

Click on the bookmarks icon on the left of the PDF Reader  
for quick access to each article.

# ***Wesleyan Theological Journal***

Volume 15, 1 — Spring — 1980

<b>Presidential Address: The Supreme Pursuit</b> <i>John A. Knight</i>	7
<b>Theology and Linguistic Analysis in the Twentieth Century</b> <i>Michael L. Peterson</i>	19
<b>Liberation Theology: A Semantic Approach</b> <i>Harold B. Kuhn</i>	34
<b>Male Headship in Paul's Thought</b> <i>Fred D. Layman</i>	46
<b>How John Fletcher Became the Theologian of Wesleyan Perfectionism, 1770-1776</b> <i>Timothy L. Smith</i>	77
<b>Thoughts Upon the Wesleyan Doctrine of Entire Sanctification With Special Reference to Some Similarities With the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Confirmation</b> <i>Laurence W. Wood</i>	88

Editor  
Lee M. Haines

**Digital texts copyright 2008  
Wesley Center Online  
<http://wesley.nnu.edu>**

*Presidential Address:*

## **THE SUPREME PURSUIT**

by

John A. Knight

In the fall of 1978 Mr. Sargent Shriver delivered a chapel address at the University of Chicago to a distinguished group of theologians, philosophers, sociologists, historians, scientists, and leaders of the laity. As he forewarned, he did not present a "polished discourse worthy of an 18th century French salon, or even of Rockefeller chapel." Rather, his words were challenging and pointed.

He quoted the Mexican philosopher-historian, Octavio Paz, who said:

The sickness of the West is moral, rather than social and economic. . . .The real, most profound discord lies in the soul of each of us. . . . The hedonism of the West is the other face of its desperation; its nihilism ends in suicide, and in inferior forms of credulity. . . . The empty place left by Christianity in the modern soul is not filled by philosophy, but by the crudest superstitions.<sup>1</sup>

Shriver then asked what can be done about the world these haunting, stunning words describe. Note his own answer: "I suggest we commence the long hard task, where scholars are needed as much as saints, of lifting ourselves from the 'pursuit of happiness,' to an additional and new level of political thought and moral vigor; to 'the pursuit of holiness.'"

Even with the implied Pelagianism, the challenge is intriguing. And to all Wesleyans, particularly members of the Wesleyan Theological Society, it should be compelling.

The lively discussions of recent meetings of this body suggest a serious desire to pursue "an understanding of holiness." Such a pursuit is imperative, for theology must inform preaching. Where there is poor theology, proclamation of the Christian message will be muffled or unbalanced. If the fine points of Wesleyan theology (assuming there is such a thing) are neglected, the Wesleyan perspective itself will become unclear or distorted.

We not only have a right to pursue an understanding of Christian holiness, but indeed an obligation as "scholars" to do so. Furthermore, we have been called as "saints" to pursue holiness itself, or holy living, as revealed in Christ. These twin "pursuits" may be more closely related in terms of cause and effect than some are willing to acknowledge. It seems

clear that a faulty understanding of holiness can hinder the full development of the life of holiness.

It is to Shriver's challenge extended from outside our immediate tradition-the pursuit of holiness-that I want to direct remarks this evening. By "holiness" I mean that divinely stimulated movement or process of grace and obedience, which extends from Christian conversion to the believer's final destiny of glorification. We affirm, of course, the reality of what we know as "entire sanctification," a God-given moment or crisis of faith and covenant which issues in increasingly responsible discipleship and immersion in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But Wesleyan thought has been truest to itself when it has given priority in the gospel message to redemption, or holiness broadly conceived, with entire sanctification as one of its essential phases. Wesley himself made this clear to all who would lay claim to his theological mantle. He observed:

If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed "fundamental" they are doubtless these two-the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter, to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature.<sup>2</sup>

Even more explicitly, he stated in his Notes on the New Testament: "Forgiveness is the beginning of redemption [holiness], as the resurrection is the completion of it."<sup>3</sup>

This Wesleyan order of priority is Pauline, for the Apostle wrote to the Corinthians: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins. . . , that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4, RSV).

My purpose here is: (1) to affirm by Scripture that one who begins to walk as a Christian begins to walk as a holy person; (2) to identify some fundamental themes of holy living; and (3) to portray the totality and wholeness of the life of holiness. The discussion presupposes the necessity and reality of the crises of regeneration and entire sanctification within the believer's life.<sup>4</sup>

### **The New Testament Christian and Holiness**

In *The Character of a Methodist and The Principles of a Methodist* (1742), in his *Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* (first edition, 1753), and in his sermons, John Wesley frequently undertook to delineate the character of a true Christian.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, his entire work and emphasis on holiness he thought of as the "recovery of primitive Christianity."<sup>6</sup>

We may ask: What is that holiness we are to pursue"? Is there a holiness life-style or life-experience, a model or realizable ideal, that in Scripture is descriptive for all Christians, which is not merely appropriate for a distinct class of believers? Is there a vocation for the whole church, and not for a particular elite within it? Wesleyan adherents believe there is.

The Apostle Paul pointed to this "way" of life in writing to the Roman Christians: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that

ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable [spiritual] service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2).

J. B. Phillips' paraphrase (of verse 2) is well known: "Do not allow the world around you to squeeze you into its mould." His lucid turn of words exegetically is well-founded for the word "conformed" has its root in schema, from which we get our English term "scheme." The Germans express the meaning of "world" with Zeitgeist, the "spirit of the age." Paul's admonition then is, "Do not allow yourself to be overcome by the secularism of the world-its schemes, aims, goals, drives, purposes, and aspirations.

Rather, the Apostle enjoined, "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds." The word "transformed" is metamorphousthe (present continuous tense). A form of the word is used to describe our Lord's "transfiguration," when His countenance shone as the face of an angel (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2). The Christian ideal, then, is to be continuously changed (metamorphosed) into the radiance and spirit of Christ, by whom and in whom believers have found salvation. This Christian "style of life" is stated explicitly by Paul to the Corinthians: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed (metamorphoumetha) into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Christlikeness is Holiness-an assertion which is supported by the biblical statement that in Christ dwelt all the "fullness [including holiness] of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). Thus we may claim that the life-style of holiness is increasing transformation by grace, and in grace, into the spirit and mind of Christ. The phrase Christianus alter Christus, "the Christian a second Christ," may sound almost blasphemous to uninstructed ears, but what else is the meaning of holiness? For what else has Christ redeemed us? Paul admonished: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5)-love, humility, unselfishness, compassion, and the spirit of servitude.

To be Christian is to be like Christ. To be like Christ is to be holy. Therefore, to be "Christian" is to be holy. To be becoming increasingly "Christian" is to be becoming increasingly like Christ, and increasingly holy. In short, Christlikeness is holiness, and increasing Christlikeness is increasing holiness.

This truth is confirmed by the fact that Paul, in his epistles, addressed the New Testament believers as "saints" (hagioi), literally, "holy ones" (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 4:12). Life in Christ, then, clearly involves a life of holiness, or holy living. The character of the Christian life is holiness or godliness-increasing conformity to the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ throughout every aspect of one's personal and social life. The believer's life of holiness does not make him a saint, but manifests him as a saint.

Holiness, then, is not a concept that is extraneous to the meaning of Christian faith; it is not a life that is "added to" the normal life of a believer as an option; it is not an experience that is designed to get the believer "high" quicker and for longer. Rather, holiness is at the heart of Christian faith—the

core of its message; it is the norm of Christian living-the constraint of its ethic; and, it is a vital and personal relationship with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit that is ever deepened, expanded, and enriched as the Christian walks in obedience-the communion of its God-given life.

Yet we in the Wesleyan tradition have drawn justifiable criticism because of our too frequent disregard of this biblical equation of holiness and the totality of the Christian life. W. M. Greathouse has stated categorically that our

folk theology . . . by its lack of broad and deep biblical grounding . . . has reduced the many-splendoured Scriptural truth of sanctification to simply "the second blessing" understood as a sort of watertight "experience" which will keep us secure until Christ returns to gather up the little flock of holiness professors.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, much of popular understanding of holiness, both within and without the recognized holiness circles, has not grasped Wesley's and Fletcher's strong biblical orientation and has thought of holiness, at best as the "deluxe edition" of the Christian life; or at worst, as an unnecessary, or even dangerous, trapping that could best be dispensed with.

We have acknowledged that holiness is central in Scripture. But have we made it so in our theology as well? Our sometimes shallow understandings at this point challenge us to compare again our thought and practice with biblical norms and teachings.

### **Some Fundamental Themes of Holy Living**

What, then, are some primary elements of the holiness life-style as shaped by Scripture? Several motifs basic to the over-all biblical mosaic are here suggested, all of which to some degree characterize all Christians in their pilgrimage to final spiritual fulfillment.

1. The holiness "style of life" is **distinct in its separation**. Throughout Scripture "separation" is included in the idea of holiness. In the Old Testament period, things were "set apart" (sanctified) for holy purposes. They became "holy" by their relation to God, e.g., the ark (2 Chron. 35:3), the Sabbaths (Exod. 20:8, 11), feasts of numerous types (Isa. 30:29), the priests' garments (Exod. 28:2), or the temple (Hab. 2:20). Even in the New Testament there is a "ceremonial" or "positional" holiness which describes prophets (Acts 3:21), apostles (Eph. 3:5), believing spouses (1 Cor. 7:14), and the temple and its altar (Matt. 23:17, 19; 1 Cor. 9:13).

However, in the New Testament the primary meaning of holiness is internalized. The temple regarded as holy is the "household of God," with all the saints, "Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:19-20). The "holy sacrifice" demanded is the living sacrifice of the believer's body (Rom. 12:1).

A fundamental characteristic of the holiness style of life, then, is separation for service (cf. Heb. 9:13-14; Titus 2:14). Negatively, this involves separation from the world and sin as a prerequisite for service; and positively, separation to God for the world as an instrument of service.

The central idea of Christianity is moral purification (ethical sanctification) of the heart from sin (Isa. 6; Acts 15:8-9). This cleansing from sin is by

faith (Acts 26:18), and encompasses an internal renovation of the self (John 3; also 17). John the Baptist spoke of the baptism with the Holy Spirit who would "thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but [would] burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:11-12). This separation is not between the tares and the wheat, or the wicked and the righteous; but between the wheat and the chaff, or that which clings to it by nature. The coming of the Holy Spirit is to cleanse from all sin-both outwardly and inwardly.<sup>8</sup>

Envisioned in the New Testament is a life-style which presupposes a cleansing of the selfish aims and impulses, urges and goals of the world. Paul stressed the necessity of this cleansing, or crucifixion of the flesh: "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:5). "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

This cleansing will manifest itself in a life-style that is uniquely different from that of the world. In his collection of essays titled in English, *Against the Stream*, Karl Barth insists that "the sanctified Christian is not called to live a mildly respectable life; he is called to swim against the stream, to witness to God's judgment over every status quo."<sup>9</sup> To commit oneself to Christ is to answer the call away from the things of the world.

But that aspect of the life-style of holiness which is separation for service includes, positively, separation to God for the world. God separates a people to Himself through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (see 1 Cor. 1:30-31). Therefore, Peter declared: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9, RSV- cf. Also Deut. 7:6).

The separation that is a part of the holiness life-style is not geographic separation from men and their needs, but a spiritual separation to God as an instrument of service. However, this separation is more than mere human dedication to certain worthy goals which will benefit mankind-as noble as this may be. Rather, it is the offering up of one's total self to God for the service of men. This yielding of the whole man is absolutely necessary if one is to be distinctively Christian; for, as Augustine reminded us: [Human] "Love feeds the hungry, but so does pride."

But in addition, this radical separation in commitment must be accompanied by a divine empowering and enduement of love<sup>10</sup>-God's kind of love-"shed abroad" [literally, "poured out"] in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

Wesley saw the necessity of this gracious bestowment, and thus finally rejected the holiness of Thomas a Kempis because it issues in a strenuous program of self-denigration aimed merely at total resignation, which becomes a kind of detached fatalism. The holiness advanced by the "quietists" (e.g., Madame Guyon) at first attracted Wesley, but then repelled him because of its antinomian and subjective tendencies. He saw clearly that holiness is more than consecration-it is a divine cleansing and empowering; and that if one is to be true to the New Testament, one must take seriously the affirmative life-style of "holiness" in the world-God's love poured out through human vessels in this life.

Any separation that is mere withdrawal from the world of broken persons who yearn in desperation for a display of God's love is false and unbiblical. And the practice of all such spurious separation is a betrayal of the New Testament portrait of holiness. Paul Rees stated it clearly: "If we are authentically Christian, nothing that is authentically human is beyond the pale of our concern. . . ."11 Dag Hammerskjold, the late Secretary-General of the United Nations, was most biblical when he said: "In our era the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action."12

To be holy is to be sent "into the world"-cleansed from sin and armed with love. It is to give oneself, made new by grace, in complete devotement to the redemptive purpose of God. Even the "Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Holiness is involvement and investment expressing itself in love. Biblical separation is incarnational. Separation for service is indispensable to the holiness life-style.

2. The Holiness style of life is **disciplined in its sanctity**. The biblical reminder is: "God hath not called us unto [for the purpose] of uncleanness, but unto [for the purpose of] holiness" [sanctification], or sanctity (1 Thess. 4:7). It is unthinkable that the New Testament Christian could exist for the purpose of uncleanness, "for this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). Thus Paul wrote to young Timothy: "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity . . . If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:19, 21). Again to the corinthians, the Apostle confided: "I keep my body under subjection ["bruise my body and make it my slave"-Weymouth], lest after I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway" ["disqualified"-RSV] (1 Cor. 9:27). P. T. Forsyth has stated it succinctly: "The final sanity is complete sanctity."13

Discipleship presupposes discipline, and when it is absent, Christ's disciple is not fulfilling his calling as one of the "saints." Paul found it necessary to exhort the careless Galatians to exercise the discipline of love for the sake of others: "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty as an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another (Gal. 5:13-14).

Holiness is spiritual fitness. It is keeping in shape so as to make optimum use of one's potential to minister. This understanding lay behind Susanna Wesley's wise counsel to young John: "Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of your body over mind, that thing for you is sin."14

Wesleyan thought, when it has been most true to the biblical life-style of holiness, has emphasized the practical social value of disciplined living. The one design of Wesley was "to promote . . . vital, practical religion, and by the grace of God to beget, preserve and increase the life of God in the soul of man."15 His purpose was not to produce a group of spiritual recluses and ascetics, but rather to prepare believers for a life of ministry to persons in society. It has been pointed out that of Wesley's forty-four standard sermons, thirty-two deal with ethics, or religion in conduct.16 Indeed, Wesley's

understanding of holiness developed in opposition to "the doctrine of predestination" and the idea of "the perseverance of the saints, which he thought led to carelessness in Christian living.<sup>17</sup>

3. The Holiness style of life is **daring in its sacrifice**. The early Christians called those who hazarded their lives for Christ *parabolani* or the "riskers," as Aquila and Priscilla, who risked their lives for Paul (Rom. 16:4; cf. also Phil. 2:29-30). To "pursue holiness" involves a venture in Christian living.

One's entire life must be risked, considered expendable for the cause of Christ. Personal ambitions and aspirations which run counter to Kingdom purposes are given up by a transformation of the self, in order that it may be a perfect instrument for the fulfillment of the will of God. There is a complete and total redirection of oneself, and a death to selfish aims and motivations. The New Testament Christian is one who delights in the daring and adventure of loving "God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and one's neighbor as himself."

God's call is for "riskers." The indwelling of the Spirit of God, which enables the disciple to stake all for Christ, involves unconditional commitment to Christ, and a death to the sinful self. John Fletcher, like good Wesleyans should, carefully distinguished "selfishness" and a "well ordered self-love."<sup>18</sup> The "death" that is called for in Scripture is not "the death of self"-an unhappy and misleading phrase which is found often in our holiness nomenclature-but "the death to self." That is, selfish-seeking, selfish-defense, selfish-assertion are rejected.

It was for this purpose that Christ died "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15). Or as Paul testified: "With Christ I have been crucified and still remain dead; and no longer is it the ego that lives, but Christ is living in me" (Gal. 2:20-literal translation). Paul's personal experience qualified him to admonish the Romans to consider themselves "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:11); and therefore to yield themselves "unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and [their] members as instruments [or weapons] of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13).

Jesus Himself required: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross (amoris tenses), and follow (present continuous tense) me" (Mark 8:34). "Taking up the cross" means putting oneself in the position of a condemned man on his way to execution, that is, going to the place of death. The supreme task of the Christian is not merely to save his soul, but to "risk" it for the sake of God's world.

The Holiness style of life is the glad acceptance of this call to venture and daring. This attitude of heart is an internal "witness," or sign, which verifies to the risker his claim to Christian discipleship. The authentic Christian witness includes the joyful acceptance of the possibility of martyrdom, without the development of a "martyr-complex." No morbid approach to life which thrives on self-pity is consistent with Christian holiness.

Nor does the Christian, as Barth argues, seek to antagonize, or win the displeasure of the world. It has been pointed out that when Daniel was in the lion's den, he did not pull the lion's tail. Yet the Christian whose first loyalty is to Christ can expect the opposition of the world.<sup>19</sup>



Nevertheless, the true believer shares the spirit of his Master, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

4. The Holiness style of life is **discerning in its spirit**. It is characterized by a profound sensitivity both to the leadership and to the reproof of the Holy Spirit. Paul underscored the significance of the guidance of the Spirit with his words: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). This New Testament ideal is illustrated by the record of the Spirit's guidance of the church at Antioch: "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had . . . prayed . . . they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed. . . ." (Acts 13:2-4).

This leadership of the Holy Spirit is the New Testament norm. Before Pentecost, the disciples cast lots in choosing a successor to Judas (Acts 1:26). But following Pentecost the biblical description is: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28).

The Holiness style of life is no stranger to this direction of the Spirit. This leadership is possible because the Holy Spirit indwells the believer, who becomes the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20). The believer is to be freely directed and motivated by the Holy Spirit, so that Paul could say: "They that are in the flesh [directed and motivated by the flesh] cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit [directed and motivated by the Spirit], if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:8-9). The Holiness style of life is sensitive not only to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, but also to His reproof Jesus promised the coming of "another Comforter," one like Himself, who would come to re-present and exalt Christ within the believer (John 16:14; also 14:26).

As the "Spirit of Truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), the Holy Spirit reveals the truth to the believer, and brings him to true self-knowledge through the light of Christ. He "desires not sacrifice" but "truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:16, 6). A part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convict and reprove. Thus Jesus made clear that "When he [the Holy Spirit] is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. . . . Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth. . . ." (John 16:8, 13).

The Holy Spirit comes to convict not merely of some unethical or questionable act-though He may do that; He comes primarily to reveal that which dethrones the Lord Jesus in one's life. He works from within the human person and makes known man's self-centeredness and hardness of heart.

The true believer does not resist this reproof, but welcomes it as for his good. He is not self-defensive, but open to the gentle chastisement of the Holy Spirit. He sees that the opposite of "doing evil" is not "doing good"-that is the futile way of human works and legalism. Rather, its opposite is "doing truth," or "being truth." He learns this from Him who is the Spirit of truth."

And when the truth is accepted and acted upon, the Spirit applies His

divine comfort-His assurance. Jesus promised: "Blessed are they that mourn [over their sins] for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). The Spirit applies this comfort by taking the things of Christ and showing them to us (John 16:14). He shows the adequacy of Christ's sacrifice for us; that our "old man of sin" was crucified with Christ-not just mended, but ended-"that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6). The Spirit teaches us, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate [paraclete, or "Comforter"] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:1-2).

If the Holy Spirit brings assurance, then the fullness of assurance comes with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul admonished: "Be filled with the [Holy] Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). The disciple of Christ is to be filled with Him by whom he has become a new creature, with Him who has come into the heart. The Holy Spirit is to be the permanent gift to the Church, and not the occasional possession of a few choice believers. That is, the actual Christian faith and life reflect the supernatural transforming power of God, the assurance of being accepted by Him through the merits of the death of His Son, and the miraculous indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

But this assurance is never static, or once for all. It is dynamic, progressive, enlarging, and vital. The literal rendering of Paul's admonition is: "Be being filled with the Spirit." That is, "keep on being filled with the Spirit." He uses the same tense-the present continuous tense-as is used in I John 1:7: "But if we walk [continue walking] in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us [continues cleansing us] from all sin."

The Holiness style of life is a growing sensitivity to the new light and instruction given by the Holy Spirit. The true believer discerns both the Holy Spirit's guidance and His reproof and is grateful for the Spirit's assurance.

### **A Final Word**

These fundamental, though not exhaustive, themes of holy living have been stated in general terms because they are intended to describe all those who have their existence "in Christ." That is, every genuine believer is characterized in some degree by each aspect of this Holiness portraiture.

Having pictured the New Testament Christian, there remains to be spoken an important word to emphasize the wholeness, continuity, and progression, of this life-style. That is, common to and running through all these descriptions is the fact that the life of Holiness is continuous and developing in its scope.

The Scriptures make clear that Holiness is the design of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Holy Living, or Christlikeness, is the end toward which God is working in the life of every person. (Eph. 1:4; Heb. 12:10; John 17:17; Titus 2:14; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 3:5.)

Holiness is Salvation! To be converted to Christ is to be set on the road to moral and spiritual perfection, to a life of holiness. It is to begin to walk in the way of holiness. To be "saved" is to be holy; to be being saved is to be becoming holy.

There are indeed critical moments within this life of holiness-i.e.,

regeneration (conversion) and entire sanctification, both of which issue in holy living. But we should steadfastly resist all temptation to reduce the biblical teaching of holiness to either one of the crisis instants within the life of the believer. To yield deliberately to such temptation in a frantic effort to preserve the distinctiveness of our heritage, or inadvertently to give way to carelessness in preaching or constructing our theology of holiness, is to destroy the beauty and vitality of the biblical truth of sanctification, and to proclaim a "mini-gospel" in place of the "whole counsel of God."

Wesley was suspicious of exalting any particular moment of Christian experience because this tends to retard further spiritual progress and growth. In his first Conference with his Methodist ministers, 1744, this proposition was agreed to:

Does not talking of a justified or sanctified state tend to mislead men? Almost naturally leading them to trust in what was done in one moment? Whereas, we are every hour and every moment pleasing or displeasing to God, according to our works; according to the whole of our inward tempers, and outward behavior.<sup>20</sup>

Wesley had great fear that the salvation or holiness which is generated by the Spirit and grace of God would not be worked out in "fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). He sought to avoid any apathy which would deter the demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit. He argued that any moment of genuine faith is not unrelated both to the previous and to the succeeding actions of the believer. Consequently, he objected to the idea and terminology of either a justified or sanctified "state," and substituted for it, in accordance with Scripture, a dynamic moment-by-moment relationship with God.

We who claim to follow in Wesley's tradition, must guard against a "hardening of the categories" (to use Dr. Paul Culbertson's colorful term). To become rigid in our understanding of holiness will be to detach our message from life and its ongoing dynamic processes, and therefore to become increasingly irrelevant. It will cause us to drive a wedge between our doctrine and our experience of holiness. It could well be that one reason our message too often has been either ignored or rejected, or even not faithfully preached by its adherents, is that we have not produced a well-rounded theology of holiness which preserves from the poverty of provincialism and the mentality of moralism.

And yet Wesley would not have wanted his objection to the use of the word "state," in the sense of a "static state," to minimize his lifelong insistence that believers now, joyously, by faith expect to enter (in the moment of entire sanctification) upon the life of perfect love in the wholly sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

For him, since it comes by faith, it is wrought instantaneously. "Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith. " Works require time-the idea that you must do something or be something-and that is pride and self-righteousness. But "if you seek it by faith, you may expect it as you are, and if as you are, then expect it now." There "is an inseparable connection between these points-expect it by faith; expect it as you are; and expect it now! To deny one of them is to deny them all."

"Look for this blessing just as you are," he said, as one who has "nothing to pay, nothing to plead, but 'Christ died' . . . He is at the door! Let your inmost soul cry out:

'Come in, come in, Thou Heavenly Guest!  
Nor hence again remove;

But sup with me and let the feast  
Be everlasting love."<sup>21</sup>

In underscoring the continuity, totality, and progressive character of the life of holiness, care must be taken, of course, to guarantee that we do not forfeit our obligation and privilege of declaring this glorious truth of entire sanctification. But this can be done best by placing the truth of entire sanctification in its proper setting within the total and larger framework of Christian thought and life.

And we must insist not only on its proper understanding and faithful proclamation, but also upon its reality in personal experience in communal and social relationships. May we accept anew the challenge laid down by Sargent Shriver and pray God to lift us from the "pursuit" of lesser things, to a "new level of . . . moral vigor; to the 'pursuit of holiness'" - the supreme pursuit.

Let us pray the words of the Wesleys' hymn:

Jesus! my life, Thyself apply,  
Thy Holy Spirit breathe,  
My vile affections crucify,  
Conform me to thy death.

Scatter the last remains of sin,  
And seal me thine abode;  
O, make me glorious all within,  
A temple built by God.

My inward holiness Thou art,  
For faith hath made Thee mine;  
With all Thy fullness fill my heart,  
'Til all I am is Thine!<sup>22</sup>

---

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Criterion," publication of the Divinity School, University of Chicago, Winter 1979.

<sup>2</sup>The Standard Sermons of John Wesley, ed. E. H. Sugden (2 vols.; London: The Epworth Press, 1921), 2:226-27.

<sup>3</sup>Notes, Col. 1:14.

<sup>4</sup>Much of this section and of the paper is taken by permission from the writer's *The Holiness Pilgrimage: Reflections on the Life of Holiness* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1973). See particularly the "Introduction" and Ch. 1.

- 5Albert Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 181.
- 6G. A. Turner, *The More Excellent Way* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1952), p. 133.
- 7W. M. Greathouse, "The Dynamics of Sanctification" (Unpublished paper read at the Nazarene Theology Conference, Overland Park, Kansas, Dec. 4-6, 1969), pp. 1-2.
- 8H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1952). 2:444.
- 9Quoted in William Hordern, *New Directions in Theology Today: Introduction* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 1:104.
- 10Wiley, 2:491.
- 11Paul Rees, *Don't Sleep Through the Revolution* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1969), p. 21.
- 12Quoted by Alan Walker in *Breakthrough: Rediscovery of the Holy Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 38.
- 13Cited by J. Paul Taylor, *Holiness-The Finished Foundation* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Light and Life Press, 1963), p. 29.
- 14Quoted in *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, Mo: Nazarene Publishing House, 1968), p. 387.
- 15The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. John Telford (8 vols.; London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 3:192. Cited hereafter as LJW.
- 16Cf. John Bishop, "Our Confessional Standards," *Motive*, May 1957, p. 13.
- 17LJW, 5:83.
- 18The Works of the Rev. John Fletcher (4 vols.; New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883), 1:483.
- 19Hordern, 1:105.
- 20Methodist Conference Minutes, 1744-98 (London: John Mason, 1862), 1 :95-96.
- 21Cited by Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, p. 282; he is quoting from Charles Wesley, *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (1741) in G. Osborn, ed., *Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley* (1872), 3:66.
- 22John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London, 1839), reprinted in *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley . . .* (collected and arranged by G. Osborn; 13 vols., London, 1869), 1:284. Cited in unpublished manuscript by Timothy L. Smith, "The Pentecostal Theme in Early Wesleyan Hymnody," p. 7.

# **THEOLOGY AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

by  
Michael L. Peterson

## **Man's Universal Interest in Words about God**

A fascinating science fiction story published some years ago portrays a high lama purchasing a Mark V Automatic Sequence Computer to install in his monastery in Tibet. However, the lama requested that the computer be modified to print out letters and not numbers. The curious purpose of all this, as he expressed it, was that his monks had been compiling a list which should contain all the possible names of God, and that the computer would enormously accelerate their work. What would have taken another fifteen hundred years would now take only a hundred days. By systematically combining sequences of letters in a special alphabet, all of the real names of God would eventually be listed. It was not long until the computer had been installed in the lamasery in the mountains of Tibet and the two engineers sent to oversee its modification and operation were about to go stir crazy watching the daily routine of monks cutting long print-outs into pages and pasting them tirelessly into books.

After some weeks at "Project Shangri-La," as the technicians George and Chuck called it, the full meaning of this curious enterprise became clear. When Chuck was finally able to inform the high lama that the machine was on its last cycle, he received such an enthusiastic response that he inquired further into the religious significance of the computer's activity. The lama did not discuss the protracted and difficult philosophical problem behind what the monks believed, but came right to the point: "Well, they believe that when they have listed all His names—and they reckon that there are about nine billion of them—God's purpose will be achieved. The human race will have finished what it was created to do, and there won't be any point in carrying on." As Chuck later related this incredible story to George, "When the list's completed, God steps in and simply winds things up . . . bingo!" At the thought that the end of the project would be the end of the world, George "gave a nervous little laugh." Thinking the matter over, the two Americans realized that when the project was over and the world did not end, it could mean trouble for them at the hand of hundreds of angry monks whose lifework seemed to have been spoiled by

a computer. Uncustomarily, they made plans to leave before the computer finished its last long series of names.

On the last day of the computer's run, Chuck and George said good-by, but the monks did not seem to mind, because they knew that the machine was running smoothly and that in just a little while their work would be culminated. Early that evening, the two engineers rode the tough mountain ponies down the winding road from the lamasery toward the old DC3 which they arranged to have waiting for them at the end of the runway. As they descended, the cold, perfectly clear Himalayan night settled in, ablaze with the now familiar, friendly stars. The end of the story is worth quoting at length:

. . . George glanced at his watch.

"Should be there in an hour," he called back over his shoulder to Chuck. Then he added, in an afterthought: "Wonder if the computer's finished its run. It was due about now."

Chuck didn't reply, so George swung round in his saddle. He could just see Chuck's face, a white oval turned toward the sky.

"Look," whispered Chuck, and George lifted his eyes to heaven. (There is always a last time for everything.)

Overhead, without any fuss, the stars were going out.<sup>1</sup>

The story, as we know, is just fiction. But it suggests the universal preoccupation of men with our language about God. To put it in a rather contemporary way, it is hoped that study of religious language moves us closer to a deeper understanding of God and our relation to Him. Understanding "God-talk," as it is frequently called, does not give any magical influence over divine activity in the world. Neither does the attempt to clarify language about God somehow drain religion of its proper mystery or God of His deity, as our story suggests. It seems that, whatever our relation to God, it is at least linguistic: however inadequately and however differently we may talk of God, we still must talk of God. The only real choice is whether we will do it carefully and self-consciously or uncritically and irresponsibly. To do it carefully, as I see it, is the fundamental motivation of philosophical examinations of religious language.

In this paper, I want to discuss the philosophy of religious language, or alternatively, the linguistic analysis of religion. The discussion divides naturally into three parts. First, it is necessary to survey the general philosophical interest in language which has prevailed in our day, and the main theories of language which have emerged from it. Second, it is enlightening to trace the implications of philosophy of language for religious language, especially Christian language. Third, it is fascinating to explore some of the areas of direct concern to those of a Wesleyan persuasion and to suggest, even if tentatively, how they are affected by these approaches to religious language, although nothing definitive and systematic has been done in this area.

It is helpful to bear in mind throughout this treatment that the various analytic schools were all interested in the same basic questions, such as "How do words get their meanings?" and "How can any use of words be justified?" Furthermore the various analytic schools agreed that these

kinds of questions could be answered by finding a theory which would specify the proper relationship of language, on the one hand, with thought and reality, on the other. What distinguishes the analytic schools from one another is that they give quite different answers to the same fundamental questions. Recognizing this is a key to fully understanding the impact of analytic philosophy-through any one of its schools-on religious language.

## I. The Historical Development of Analytic Philosophy

The development of analytic philosophy in this century falls into four phases: common sense realism, logical atomism, logical positivism, and conceptual elucidation. Each historical phase was characterized by a distinct view of the nature and function of language. In the early realism phase and the later elucidation phase the basic notion was that the ordinary language is adequate for its purpose and is the repository of our most fundamental philosophical commitments. On this view, the analysis of ordinary language should reveal and clarify the assumptions which we commonly make about reality, knowledge, values, etc. However, according to the phases of logical atomism and logical positivism, ordinary language is fraught with confusions and must be supplanted by a rigorous and precise language. Though atomism and positivism differed in their specification of what this new technically perfect language

should be, they agreed that constructing such an ideal language is the philosopher's main task. Let us now review how these two motifs of ordinary language analysis and ideal language analysis find expression in the appropriate phases of the analytic movement.

Realism at the turn of the twentieth century was formulated by G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. They were spokesmen for the growing discontent among professional philosophers with the absolute idealism of F. H. Bradley, a view which held that all individual finite things are ultimately unified in one overarching mental or ideal Reality, and that their plurality in human consciousness is merely in appearance.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the foundational document of the realistic movement was Moore's "Refutation of Idealism" (1903) which argued for the independent status of perceived material objects subject to real external relations.<sup>3</sup> The early writings of Moore and Russell articulated and defended many important realistic, anti-idealistic themes: matter is not reducible to mind; universals are not reducible to particulars; sense perception and ordinary judgments about it are trustworthy; and, with Moore, goodness is a real, but non-natural property known by intellectual intuition.<sup>4</sup> As the realistic movement developed through the first quarter of this century, Moore became entrenched in his common sense position and Russell gradually became skeptical of it.

By 1918, Russell's philosophy was clearly changing. His publication of "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" was a pioneer effort to formulate a metaphysical interpretation of the import of logic.<sup>5</sup> Just a few years before, Russell had collaborated with A. N. Whitehead on *Principia Mathematica* (1910-1913) and had thus already developed a rigorous and technical logical apparatus for philosophy.<sup>6</sup> But the shining achievement of the movement was undoubtedly Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), a notoriously difficult book which espouses the view that traditional philosophical problems are due to logical and linguistic confusions and that



such difficulties can be solved by generating a rigorous logic for language.<sup>7</sup> Although Russell and Wittgenstein differed somewhat over the exact nature of the ideal language program, they essentially agreed that elementary units (i.e., atoms) of language, thought, and reality could be correlated with each other and structured according to logical form.<sup>8</sup> Language which cannot be so structured is devoid of meaning.

Logical atomism was but another stage in the gradual evolution of the analytic movement. Atomism was eventually replaced by what is probably the best known of the analytic schools, logical positivism. Logical positivism thrived approximately from the beginning of the Vienna Circle (1922) to the outbreak of World War II, though positivists were active into the mid-1950s. The rallying point for the positivists was the verifiability criterion of meaning. According to this criterion, no statement could have cognitive significance or meaning unless it could be verified in empirical experience. This doctrine soon led to the rejection of metaphysics and theology as cognitively significant, a reduction of ethics to emotive expression, a conventionalistic or formalistic view of mathematics and logic, and a notion that all sciences were in principle unified by the empirical method.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, most of these perspectives were wrongly attributed to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, an error which he was later to correct and in doing so initiate yet another historical phase of the analytic movement. Other foundational writings of positivism include: Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1934); and A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936).<sup>10</sup> The basic task of philosophy came to be understood as that of clarifying the proper logic of empirical meaning and verification for the sciences. All other areas of language (e.g. metaphysics and ethics) which are not readily amenable to strict empirical standards became viewed as cognitively meaningless.<sup>11</sup>

The logical positivist movement was plagued both by its own internal difficulties and by external criticism. Internally, positivism was unable to verify itself by its own empirical standard. Externally, it was unable to account for the empirical status of universal generalizations (to unobserved empirical events) as the laws of science. As positivism struggled to deal with these problems, the verifiability principle transmuted into strong and weak versions, and then into a falsifiability principle, and still fell short of the goal for a perfect logico-empirical language.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the great German genius, Wittgenstein, decided to free philosophers from the spurious ideal. As Wittgenstein put it, "a picture [of language] held us captive," and we must reject it in order to find the correct understanding of our language.

The appearance of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) marked the beginning of a major trend toward ordinary language analysis once again.<sup>13\*\*</sup> Another influential work which arose independently of the investigations, Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (1949), also expressed the same ordinary language theme: what is needed in philosophy is a detailed description of how common language actually works rather than a new schema for logically perfect language. Wittgenstein, Ryle, and others such as John Wisdom and J. L. Austin, advised that we look to language to elucidate the role of important philosophical concepts (e.g., "cause," "mind," "pain," "knowledge," "will," etc.). Like Moore's early realism, this

new stage of conceptual elucidation rested on the belief that traditional philosophical theories end in puzzlement and confusion when the implicit conceptual structures of ordinary language are misunderstood or ignored. So the emphasis returns to ordinary language analysis as the way to eliminate the philosophical puzzlement.

## II. The Implications of the Analytic Schools of Theology

Of the four stages of linguistic analysis in the twentieth century, only the first-early realism-developed no clear and definite theory of the nature and function of religious language, though some extrapolation could be made as to what the early realistic doctrines would imply.<sup>15\*\*</sup> However, subsequent stages of the linguistic movement involved quite interesting and important views of religious discourse which must now be reviewed.

The logical atomism of the early Wittgenstein seems to recommend mysticism about the ultimate matters of religion. But the mysticism in question is not the popular type which typically involves extraordinary and unusual experiences. Instead it is a sophisticated realization that there are certain "givens" to the philosophical mind about which it can only wonder and never formulate complete explanation.

Early in the Tractatus, Wittgenstein claims that two of these "givens" are the very existence of the world and the necessity and universality of logic. Regarding the world, he begins by affirming that

(1) The world is all that is the case.

He then explains that the world is the totality of individual facts. Facts relate how things are; but that there is anything at all is mystical:

(6:44) It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists.

Since only discrete facts are capable of being asserted, or "said," the world as the totality of contingent facts is an object of sheer wonder.

Furthermore, the conditions of factual or empirical assertion (or "saying") are the laws of logic. But the conditions of assertion cannot themselves be asserted (or "said"); they can only be "shown" or "made manifest," according to the Tractatus:

(4.1212) What can be shown, cannot be said.

(6.124) The propositions of logic describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they represent it.

(6.13) Logic is transcendental.

So, logic too is an object of wonder; it is in a real sense, mystical.

This general sense of the transcendental and mystical leads Wittgenstein to talk about other ultimate matters which also seem to lie beyond simple empirical assertion: the self, values, the meaning of life, and God. Consider just a few of the relevant passages in the Tractatus:

(6.41) The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything

happens as it does happen: in it no value exists-and if it did exist, it would have no value.

(6.421) It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental.

(6.52) We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer.

(6.521) The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem. (Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?)

(6.522) There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.

These remarks by Wittgenstein are particularly intriguing in light of another emphasis which he has-that all I can know of the empirical world is what my own cognitive field contains of it, and that my cognitive field can contain no more than what my language can deliver. Consider:

(5.6) The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.

(5.61) Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits.

(5.61). . .The world is my world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of language (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of my world.

(5.63) I am my world. (The microcosm.)

(6.45) ...Feeling the world as a limited whole-it is this that is the mystical.

These and other aphoristic statements in the *Tractatus* express what many commentators call Wittgenstein's peculiar form of solipsism, linguistic solipsism.<sup>16</sup> This is the position that all I can say about the world is what I can empirically experience, and that the boundaries of empirical experience are somehow linguistically defined. Yet there is a religious character to my experience of the world which I cannot put into meaningful assertions. I want to say more about myself, values, God, and other absolute concerns, but I cannot. The implication here for religion, then, is what we may term linguistic mysticism.<sup>17</sup> According to this position, any attempt to assert the meaning of life or the existence of God or the like must therefore be viewed as a trivialization, entirely beside the point of ultimate importance (cf. 6:41 above).

The implications of logical positivism for religion are much easier to explain than those of logical atomism. Essentially, positivism's most direct

point of contact with religion is the verifiability criterion of meaning, or the later falsifiability criterion of meaning. Probably one of the most familiar positivistic attacks waged on religion, using an empirical standard of meaning, was Antony Flew's "Theology and Falsification."<sup>18</sup> Flew claims that no statement is cognitively significant unless it is falsifiable in empirical experience. Any statement which is not thus testable is thereby meaningless, neither true nor false. Flew then argued that religious believers refuse to allow their statements even to be tested, much less falsified, by what appears to be strong negative empirical evidence. Hence, their claims are cognitively meaningless, not to be taken with intellectual seriousness.

Flew makes his point by relating a parable about a Believer and a Skeptic who are exploring in a jungle. The explorers come upon a clearing where many flowers and many weeds are growing. The Believer says, "Some gardener tends this plot." The Skeptic replies, "No gardener tends this plot." So, they pitch their tents and set a watch to see whether a gardener will come. They do not see a gardener and thus erect an electrified barbed wire fence. Still no gardener is detected. So they set out bloodhounds with no better results. Test after test uncovers no gardener, contrary to what the Believer had thought. The Believer is driven to modify his original claim again and again until it ultimately means an "invisible, intangible, eternally elusive" gardener, which Flew calls "death by a thousand qualifications." In other words, the Believer eliminates all empirical meaning from his assertions until they cease to be assertions at all.

Logical positivism lands in what I call linguistic reductionism. In effect, what positivism does is to require that religious statements conform to the strict empirical standard of meaning appropriate to scientific claims. Thus positivism reduces religion to science and then conveniently finds it lacking. It is now history that positivism did greatly clarify our thinking about the meaning and empirical reference of certain areas of language, but eventually failed even to make full sense of science, much less of religion. At best, positivism opened the way for philosophers to look elsewhere for the meaning of ethical statements. Theories of emotive meaning, moral meaning, and eschatological meaning, among others, gained currency. But it is also history that these theories, having assumed that positivism had crowded religion out of the cognitive sphere, also failed to find fully adequate meaning for religious language.

Arid positivism had to be overthrown. Who better to overthrow it than Wittgenstein whose misunderstood Tractatus gave impetus to the movement in the first place? Wittgenstein rethought the whole notion that the elements of language, thought, and reality could be neatly correlated with one another and structured by perfect logical form. He decided that this orientation produces "mental cramp." Wittgenstein set out to discover new insights about words and meaning in his Blue and Brown Books, which he begins with the question "What is the meaning of a word?" But his most notable achievement in this area is his Philosophical Investigations. The essential claim of the Investigations is that the meaning of a word cannot be identified with one constant thing or concept. Instead he came to hold that

43. For a large class of cases-though not for all-in which we

employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.<sup>19</sup>

He insisted that this emphasis on use is not just another theory of meaning, in which case it would be subject to overgeneralization and rigidity in the same way classic theories had. No one constant element can always supply the meaning of any given word. Language is too rich and varied for that. Words are invested with meaning through being used in various ways in language.

Furthermore, according to Wittgenstein, language itself is really a composite of "language-games." What this metaphor of "language-games" suggests (at the risk of oversimplification for brevity's sake) is that there are different areas of human language, each with its own set of implicit rules, meanings, uses, and purposes. In this way, we might call science, religion, ethics, and other contexts of speech "language-games." The insight which emerged out of this very fertile idea is that it is absurd to require talk in one language-game to conform to the rules and practices appropriate for talk in another language-game.

Hence, for our interests, positivism is mistaken because it tries to make religious language subject to the standards of meaning and truth for scientific language. Each area of language is as legitimate as any other, though they are all different. And, Wittgenstein reminds us that it will not do to try to specify something common to all games such that the various language-games might also be judged by common standards:

66. Don't say: "There must be something common, or they would not be called 'games'"—but look and see whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, empirical investigation of the ways we actually use language supports Wittgenstein's thesis that there are many uses for language and many sources of meaning. Religious language, then, must have its own legitimate uses and appropriate sources of meaning which can be determined by close study.

Much of what Wittgenstein says about the variegated texture and pattern of our human language seems correct. Many authors have adopted his approach and have provided more thorough studies of religious language per se, particularly Christian language. These authors generally accept the later Wittgensteinian idea that language is a human activity, and perhaps the distinctively human activity, and then set out to examine the linguistic activity of religion. Paul van Buren is one who has done this in his book, *The Edges of Language*, a work which explicitly claims to be an application of Wittgensteinian insights to Christianity.<sup>21</sup> Van Buren's aim is not to argue that Christianity is true, but to describe the various modes of discourse actually employed by professing Christians. His approach is quite typical of the neo-Wittgensteinian penchant for what Carl F. H. Henry calls impressionistic lexicography, which focuses attention exclusively on grammar and function, and hence becomes "talk about talk."<sup>22</sup> This approach, as enlightening as it may be about the ways we actually do

use language—even religious language, has come to serve a purely descriptive, not normative, role. It essentially takes religious language usage at face value and tries to delineate its inherent logic and application. It arrives at what are variously called "linguistic models," "grammatical maps," "paradigms cases," and so forth, for religious language.

Although it could be argued that van Buren and other linguistic philosophers of religion do not understand the later Wittgenstein (much as the positivists did not understand the early Wittgenstein),<sup>23</sup> their work is typical of most contemporary linguistic philosophy of religion done under his impact. Philosophers under this influence view the Christian religion as a distinctive way of speaking about the world and experience, and thus of interpreting the world and relating oneself to the world. To become a Christian, whatever else might be involved, is to become competent in a certain distinctive way of speaking about and, hence, of interpreting, the world.

However, van Buren and others generally lose sight of the further question which arises after this distinctive way of speaking has been properly described: Is the Christian language-game valid, are its linguistic paradigms adequate—in short, is Christianity true? Paul van Buren and others never question whether the Christian language-game ought to be played, whether Christian language ought to be used at all. At most, they say that it expands our horizons, gives added dimension to life, provides a new way of interpreting the world of experience. But they seldom raise the question of whether it is true. This neglect leads rather obviously to what I call linguistic relativism. Just as the linguistic philosophers of religion have told us that the Christian language-game is as valid as those of science, ethics, romance, etc., they would presumably have to admit that those of Hinduism and Buddhism are also equally valid. In short, many neo-Wittgensteinian philosophers are remiss in providing grounds for internal revision within, say, the game of Christian God-talk, and in specifying the grounds on which the objective truth of Christian language can be judged.<sup>24</sup>

Remaining with van Buren as our representative linguistic philosopher of religion, we can detect certain misplaced emphases and mistaken commitments which lead him and others to linguistic relativism. First is the idea that not the proposition (or truth-claim) but the word (or propositional component) is the proper locus of genuine religious meaning. Hence linguistic analysis of religion is frequently an analysis of words whose grammar or logic can be elaborated into a whole model or paradigm.<sup>25</sup> But this means that propositional claims of a religion lose significance in deference to words, and hence that the question of truth and falsity does not tend to arise. Second, many linguistic philosophers of religion have at least implicitly capitulated to the positivist insistence that literal truth belongs primarily to the domain of scientific, empirical facts. Hence, philosophers of religion look elsewhere for the significance of religious discourse, such as its ability to organize human experience, instill hope, and so forth.<sup>26</sup> The main reason van Buren says that Christianity is at "the edges of language" is precisely because he tacitly accepts the positivistic picture that the clear straightforward center of language is occupied by science. By positivistic standards, then, Christian language is out at the limits of language, stretching and straining at the boundaries of our human discourse, trying almost to say more than can meaningfully be said and running the risk thereby of lapsing into total meaninglessness.<sup>27</sup>

### III. Conceptual Elucidation and Wesleyan Concerns

Linguistic philosophy of religion today, done under the impact of the later Wittgenstein, has resulted in a number of important studies of Christian language by van Buren and others. But it is not always apparent just what hearing these studies have or could have on the concerns of the Wesleyan-Arminian wing of Protestant Christianity. In this last section, I venture some exploratory remarks about the application of linguistic philosophy to certain concerns which those of Wesleyan-Arminian persuasion have. Although the list of such concerns might grow quite long, I select here just two: biblical authority and Christian experience.

First, the whole issue of the authority of Scripture is perhaps more alive today among evangelicals themselves than it was a generation ago between the conservative evangelicals and the liberals. Various labels are employed to denote a "strong view" of Scripture: inerrant, infallible, authoritative, divine, absolutely trustworthy, sufficient, and so forth. The general field of religious language seems to have some application to this very important concern, particularly in respect to the nature of the inspiration in the giving of the Scriptures and to their continuing intrinsic nature.

First, some comments on the giving of the Scriptures. Neo-Wittgensteinians make a great deal out of the meaning of language arising from a shared form of life. Mutual understanding of language, they hold, develops from a common background among persons. The implication of this for any notion of verbal inspiration of the Scriptures would seem to be that God is (if not "wholly other") "significantly other" and does not seem to share our human form of life. Van Buren makes this kind of point when he reminds us of Wittgenstein's remark that if a lion could talk, we could not understand him—the clear implication being that we and lions do not share a common background.<sup>28</sup>

Now these neo-Wittgensteinian insights at least throw up a caution about portraying our knowledge of God in a glib and simplistic way, and at most provide one more reason for rejecting a strict verbal or dictation theory of biblical inspiration. However, I believe that Wesleyans can go a long way toward satisfying the neo-Wittgensteinians at this point, and in doing so find deeper understanding of some of our own cherished doctrines. We affirm both that God was in Christ and shared our common human life and that God is the sovereign Creator who made man in His image—affirmations which suggest important areas of commonality between human and divine. And, if the neo-Wittgensteinian emphasis on commonality is correct, it provides an interesting and somewhat unexpected critique of competing religions which are non-incarnational and which make God so wholly other or transcendent that man has nothing in common with Him.

Second, a few remarks about the implications for the whole issue of biblical authority vis-à-vis the present intrinsic nature of Scripture and how to characterize it. There is a general insistence among evangelicals that the Bible is somehow "infallible." Yet the neo-Wittgensteinian approach to ordinary language reminds us that language is an imperfect and developing human tool, a growing and changing organism, a phenomenon in which there is no inherent standard of exactness or precision, and so on. On the one hand, this kind of linguistic suggestion would seem to eliminate our using words such as "infallible" to evaluate the character of Scripture. And

yet I think that this point is well taken if we mean by "infallible" that every term and proposition must be taken literally, as though it could not have been expressed otherwise, as though God directly carved each phrase out of stone. On the other hand, if we take this linguistic insight seriously, it supplies a healthy way of understanding our present written Word of God. Whatever else the language of the Bible is, it is fallible human language, and as such allows no transcendent or absolute criterion of exactness or precision. Language is not a static entity but an activity, according to modern linguistic philosophers. And, as an activity, it is more or less adequate for its purposes. The Scriptures, then, are perhaps better characterized in terms of their adequacy, trustworthiness, effectiveness to accomplish relevant purposes. It is in this sense that Wesleyans can call the Bible "infallible" or "inerrant." This approach still takes into account its divine or miraculous aspect, since it is entirely compatible with God's moving and guiding the human writers as they use human language.

The second general point of interest for Wesleyan-Arminians is that of Christian experience. The Wesleyan emphasis on the reality of Christian experience, whether in initial conversion, subsequent sanctification, or daily confirmation, can be understood in new and fresh ways by drawing insights from linguistic philosophy. If one gets past the anti-supernaturalistic bias of some theories of religious language (e.g., any view which entails that Christian experience is wholly explicable in naturalistic terms and hence that Christian language does not really refer to any supernatural person or activity), then he can still benefit from much of what linguistic philosophers of religion have to say about Christian experience.

To begin, linguistic philosophers typically hold that "experience" is not just an emotional or non-cognitive phenomenon. Instead human experience is linguistically conditioned.<sup>29</sup> In other words, our distinct language or language-game is the repository of our beliefs, values, and categories-most of which we simply inherit by being born into or initiated into a certain community of language users. And any experience is conditioned by this framework of beliefs, values, and categories, such that a purely and strictly emotional experience would be nothing to us. To have significance, experience must be interpreted by conceptual commitments which we have, and these reside in a very real way in language. This gets at what Wittgenstein called the difference between "seeing" and "seeing as."<sup>30</sup> Applying this insight to experience in general, it may well be that we never have pure, uninterpreted experience, which we then interpret through some temporal process. Rather, we always experience some object or situation in the light of an existing interpretation. We see, or experience, linguistically.<sup>31</sup>

To elaborate this theme, we next need to realize that persons with a different language or language-game thereby hold different conceptual commitments. And persons with different conceptual commitments have qualitatively different experiences. This accents the importance of mastering to a high degree the Christian language-game: It is a key to having proper Christian experiences of all the relevant Christian realities. Furthermore, since a language-game is fundamentally a public phenomenon, the Christian public, or better, the Christian community, must undertake to examine the experience of its members. It makes this examination in large part by what its members say-how well its members have mastered



certain distinctively Christian ways of speaking about their experience.

One conclusion which can be drawn from all this is that no experience per se, not even what we call Christian experience, can be properly understood apart from its being linguistically conditioned. But this entails that it is the conceptual structure, residing as it does within a specific linguistic structure, which makes any experience meaningful or significant. Hence studying the language which embodies the conceptual structure becomes very important. The purely emotional dimension of one's experience, so to speak, is determined by a host of other factors, including chemical reactions, the state of the nervous system, and his unique personal history-and thus are deeply personal and private, not capable of being fully felt by or communicated to anyone else. Only insofar as our Christian language, and with it our Christian conceptual structure, is shared, can we have common Christian experience. This recognition should prompt a measure of humility in talking of one's personal experience with God, and remind us that the conceptual dimension is not divorced from but is intimately connected to the experiential dimension of Christianity.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of the linguistic philosophy of religion in the twentieth century cannot be underestimated. During its development, it progressively forced religious believers to be more responsible in their talk of God, and now offers believers helpful approaches to a host of serious issues. It is capable of exposing meaningless religious gibberish for what it is and of providing new and fresh ways of understanding legitimate religious discourse. This paper has all too summarily surveyed the history of the linguistic movement, traced some of its well-known implications for religion, and ventured some of its applications to Wesleyan concerns. Much more of interest is presently being done in this rich and exciting field, including the comparison of the logic of "God" with the logic of "I," the examination of paradox in religion, the performative function of credal statements, and the integration of the language of faith with the language of reason.<sup>32</sup>

Our opening story suggested that the human investigation into God talk has some fixed terminus, some designated point at which words can exhaust the knowledge of God. It is almost as if the holy and transcendent-when it is robbed of its mystery-will not continue the human endeavor. However, I believe that the interest in words about God is in reality open-ended, as it should be; for religious language seeks insight into the infinite and inexhaustible God of Christianity. It seems to be God's good pleasure that we continue to speak and examine human words about Him, so that we may ever find new treasures within the divinely bestowed gift of language. And furthermore, we know that it is His delight to give us His Words, for in them is life eternal.

---

## NOTES

- 1 Arthur Clarke, "The Nine Billion Names of God," in his collection of short stories entitled *The Nine Billion Names of God* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1967).
- 2 F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930).
- 3 G. E. Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," reprinted in Morris Weitz, ed., *Twentieth-Century Philosophy: The Analytic Tradition* (New York: The Free Press, 1966) pp. 15-34.
- 4 See Weitz' Introduction, *Twentieth-Century Philosophy*, p. 3.
- 5 Bertrand Russell, *Logic and Knowledge, Essays, 1901-1950*, Robert Charles Marsh, ed. (New York: Capricorn Books, 1968).
- 6 A. N. Whitehead and B. Russell, *Principia Mathematica* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1910-13).
- 7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, trans. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961).
- 8 An excellent summary of this and other atomistic theses can be found in Justus Hartnack, *Wittgenstein and Modern Philosophy*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1965).
- 9 See Weitz' Introduction, *Twentieth-Century Philosophy*, pp. 8-9.
- 10 Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language* (New York: Humanities Press, 1961); A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Press, 1936).
- 11 E.g., Carnap, "The Rejection of Metaphysics" and Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms" in Weitz, *Twentieth-Century Philosophy*.
- 12 See Weitz's Introduction, *Twentieth-Century Philosophy*, and Barry Gross, *Analytic Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Pegasus Books, 1970).
- 13 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., G. E. M. Anscombe trans. (New York: Macmillan Press, 1958).
- 14 Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949).
- 15 For example, one might expect the early realists to hold that certain religious concepts are irreducible and refer to objective realities. And yet the tendency of realism toward empiricism and naturalism is ever present.
- 16 G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), chapter 13.
- 17 I first suggested this term to Carl F. H. Henry for his appraisal of linguistic philosophy. See his *God, Revelation and Authority*, Waco: Word Books, 1979), 3:451-52.

18Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1955).

19Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 20e.

20Ibid., p. 31e.

21Paul van Buren, *The Edges of Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. i.

22Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 3, chapter 26.

23For instance, it is not completely clear that Wittgenstein would call religion and science different "language-games," or that he would hermetically seal off religious language from other areas of language, or that he would put religious language at the "edges of language."

24I fear that many neo-Wittgensteinians rob Christianity of what Carl Henry calls its "persuasive epistemic credentials" by ignoring its claim to objective truth; *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:213-14.

25See Frederick Ferre, *Language, Logic and God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961); it is an excellent survey of the different models which have been generated, including the logic of verification, the logic of function, the logic of obedience, the logic of analogy, the logic of encounter, and others.

26Ibid.

27vanBuren, *The Edges of Language*, pp.129-131.

28Ibid., chapter 4

29Ibid., pp. 66-67.

30Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 12 le,

31Of course, all this must be elaborated in such a way as to allow for a temporal process in some further interpretations of experience and for revision and correction of a given linguistic-interpretive framework.

32For just a small sample of the work being done in the linguistic philosophy of religion, see the attached bibliography.

### **Bibliography**

Anscombe, G. E. M. *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.

Ayers, Robert and William Blackstone, eds. *Religious Language and Knowledge*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972.

Bendall, Kent and Frederick Ferre. *The Logic of Faith*. New York: Association Press, 1962.

Brown, Stuart. *Do Religious Claims Make Sense?* New York: Macmillan, 1969.

Charlesworth, M. J. *The Problem of Religious Language*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974.

- Donovan, Peter. *Religious Language*. New York: Hawthorne Books, 1976.
- Ferre, Frederick. *Language, Logic and God*. New York: Harper, 1961.
- Flew, Antony and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. New York: Macmillan, 1955.
- Gilkey, Langdon. *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God  
Language*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969.
- High, Dallas, ed. *Language, Persons, and Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *New Essays on Religious Language*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Hudson, Donald. *Ludwig Wittgenstein*. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968.
- Mananzan, Sr. Mary-John. *The Language Game of Confessing One's Belief*. Tubigen: M. Neimeyer, 1974.
- Ramsey, Ian. *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases*. New York: Macmillan, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ed. *Words About God*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Santoni, Ronald E. ed. *Religious Language and the Problem of Religious Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968.
- van Buren, Paul. *The Edges of Language: An Essay in the Logic of a  
Religion*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.

## **LIBERATION THEOLOGY: A SEMANTIC APPROACH**

by

Harold B. Kuhn

It is a commonplace that there are several forms of theology which are called by the qualifier "Liberation," each of which in its own right professes to outline some form of deliverance for a group feeling itself to be disadvantaged or marginated. Latterly however, the term "Liberation Theology" has become most commonly and clearly associated with Latin America. The conditions which prevail in this part of the world do, of course, condition the objectives which Latin American Liberation Theology seeks to achieve. The economic and political factors which affect the mutual relationships between the United States on the one hand, and the Latin American Republics on the other, serve also to bring theological reflection in the South forcibly to the attention of our own theological scene.

The special historical conditions prevailing in Latin America tend also to cause the peoples of the area to develop in a special way the theological pluralism which is part of today's theological scene. For instance, theologians from the region insist that classic "Northern" theologizing has failed to take into account the context of experience in their lands. Feeling that important segments of the Word of God have been neglected in the theologies of the North, the creative minds of this segment of the world call, not only for an enlargement of northern theological perspectives, but also for a total indigenizing of Latin American theology—a regional re-orienting of classical American-West European theology(-ies).

Much of what is being written in analysis of Latin American Liberation Theology tends to present such diversity that the reader easily becomes lost in the maze of statements and counter statements. This paper aims to elucidate the major features of Liberation Theology by means of a glossary of terms—terms which tend to take on a specialized use and in some cases to become mere slogans. There is no special significance in the order in which I have chosen to take up and define these terms. Some of the definitions may tend to reinforce one another, in which case later ones may be elucidated by those discussed earlier.

## Liberation

One would naturally think that, given the title "Liberation Theology," the meaning of the term "Liberation" would be unambiguous, or at least clearly defined. Actually, the definition is far from clear. James Thomas O'Connor notes at this point that:

It is a "dangerous" concept, laden with ambiguities, almost begging for misinterpretation. So intimately is it associated with certain social and political ideologies (not all of them, in all their aspects, acceptable to a Christian), so apparently "unspiritual" is it, so provocative, so misused since Medellin by some theologians that one might wonder whether it has any more to offer us than a "Political Theology" or the various theologies of hope or of development.<sup>1</sup>

A major difficulty in definition is found in the fact that advocates of the Liberation Theology tend to identify every form of liberation as being Christ-oriented. As a result, one may ask, what necessity is there of being explicitly Christian at all, or even of being identified with the Church? As O'Connor points out: "May not the liberating work of a Che Guevara be as anticipatory (Christologically) as that of a Helder Camara? May not a Marxist or socialist ideology be as liberating . . . for man as a Nicene Creed?"<sup>2</sup>

The issue becomes even more complicated as one notes the manner in which liberation theologians utilize the account of the Exodus as a paradigm for every form of liberation. And the more the concept of liberation becomes politicized, the more difficult it becomes to view it as a genuinely theological concept at all. Now, no Evangelical will deny that Christian redemption is liberating in its very nature and in its true thrust. And within the Wesleyan understanding of things, personal liberation in an Evangelical sense does have profound implications for the expression of that reality in the believer's social milieu.

However, many or most of the applications of the term in conventional Latin American usage tend to follow the model of the Medellin Conference of 1966 in setting "theology of liberation" against what is rather easily termed "theology of oppression." By this last is meant that most of Western Christianity (should we say, Western Christendom?) has either stood on the side of the oppressor, or else, and worse still, has been the oppressor.

It is important to note also, that Latin American thinkers have come to view the liberal theology of the late nineteenth-century and its development in our century as an instrument of continued domination and exploitation. This will be noted in another perspective under the rubric of "Development," but it should be noted here that such a thinker as Gustavo Gutierrez regards American theology as a mere continuation of "the dominant European theology" with its colonial mentality.<sup>3</sup>

Gutierrez faults the liberal churchmen for promising the developing world a kind of utopia and suggesting that the developing nations would follow the developed world (i.e., the United States and Western Europe) in economic and technological matters. The bitter disappointment of the liberation theologians came from the fact that such "development"

provided active participation in economic progress only to the white creole elite, so that "The poorer sectors, Indians, Blacks and Mestizos, either had no participation, or they had a passive participation, in many cases only sporadically."<sup>4</sup> It follows that "liberation" means for the Latin American masses deliverance from the exploitation which came through the identification of the Latin bourgeois interests with those of the same class in Western Europe and the United States.

This means that "liberation" must ultimately free the Latin American masses from "the exploitation carried out by the modern countries [which was] . . . a traumatic experience which cannot be forgotten when one speaks of freedom and democracy in the continent."<sup>5</sup> This will involve, as a minimum, economic liberation of the peoples "south of the border" from the entire Northern World's system vis-a-vis Latin America, together with their political liberation from their own creole elite.

Such "liberation" is envisioned as reciprocal, particularly in its theoretical and ideological aspect. Here is proposed a freeing of both oppressed and oppressor, perhaps in reverse order. That is to say, when oppression ceases, the invisible sickness of the oppressing powers will be healed, no less than that of the visible (economic) sickness of the disadvantaged and marginalized masses.

Not only are the oppressing persons, agencies and systems to be liberated, but theology itself (that is, the dominant theology of the North, and particularly that of the self-deceived conciliar theology) must undergo a process of freeing. This is indicated dramatically in the title of the volume by Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*. Father Segundo's thesis is that a return to the Reformers under the formula "faith seeking Understanding" will bring theological changes affecting the depths of Christian consciousness, and will again place "Jesus and Christian Faith on the side of the struggle for liberation."<sup>6</sup>

With this Gustavo Gutierrez agrees, in that he sees, contra Marx, that the religious impulse is a valid consciousness, and one to be turned as Richard J. Neuhaus puts it, toward "the task of history and away from the suprahistorical preoccupations that characterize most religious life at present."<sup>7</sup> The Rev. Mr. Neuhaus objects to one of the major theses of Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation*, in that it "comes close to providing carte blanche legitimation for joining almost any alleged revolutionary struggle to replace any allegedly repressive regime."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, he feels that Gutierrez's projection of "a new man in a new society" is most precarious, and in reality suprahistorical.<sup>9</sup> Schubert Ogden points out that the term "liberation" is poorly defined with respect to that which it intends.

But while there is thus a single process of liberation embracing both redemption and emancipation, these two processes are sufficiently distinct from one another that only serious confusion can result from simply identifying them.<sup>10</sup>

And yet this confusion occurs constantly in the literature of liberation theologians. All too frequently, after outlining political and economic liberation and giving it high priority, these writers as a seeming afterthought note that individual spiritual liberation is also necessary. What is at stake here is, of course, a matter of priorities.

Much more might be said concerning some of the features of Liberation Theology which seem from our perspective to be excessive. Perhaps one of the most serious of these is pointed out in Thomas M. McFadden's preface to *Liberation, Revolution, and Freedom*. Quoting from Juan Luis Segundo's *Our Idea of God*, McFadden notes "that Latin America has its own special destiny to proclaim a new understanding of the Christian tradition and of western civilization."<sup>11</sup> Equally sweeping is the statement of Gustavo Gutierrez: "The theology of liberation is a theology of salvation in the concrete historical and political circumstances of today."<sup>12</sup>

Statements such as these indicate some of the outer perimeters of this form of "doing theology" as these are perceived by its major advocates.

### **Development**

The immense sociocultural transformation of the modern age is marked by a growing awareness of the economic basis for that transformation. For decades, the term "development" promised to meet the yearnings of modern men and women for better living conditions. The countries north of the equator were expressing in their economic life the optimism of conventional liberalism, with its rather uncritical acceptance of the view that the developing lands need only follow the example of the industrial powers (i.e., in economic expansion) and that such a policy would bring a corresponding improvement to their standards of life.

Liberation theology has given currency to the view that the idea of development is by no means a univocal one, but one which is capable of several definitions. It is increasingly clear that its expositors have rejected decisively the usual "liberal" definition of the term. The grounds for this rejection are complex, but have as a common denominator the contention that conventional development rests upon a "headstart" basis—that is, that it had as a prius an economic and industrial base which enabled developed lands to chart their own course. Such a base, it is alleged, is lacking in the developing lands, with the result that they are in no position to develop on their own terms in the bourgeois world. Gutierrez, especially, rejects developmentalism as being at all points hopelessly wed to capitalist scenarios.

GNP and per capita income may serve as indicators for the northern nations; but their achievement in developing lands is inhibited, or even prevented, by the structures of international economics. Thus development as a global process is held to be, in our time, impossible, and development has thus become a pejorative term. True, attempts were made to improve the lot of Latin American lands in the '50s, but because they did not correct the roots of the economic situation existing between North and South, they only led to frustration, and confusion. Liberation theologians note that developing in the modernizing sense was controlled by international agencies which were in turn controlled by the massive forces controlling the world economy. These agencies worked with local oligarchies—the creole interests—so that the changes were really means to increase the power of massive economic groups.

Thus, development in the sense intended by the industrialized nations seems to such theologians inadequate to fulfill the hopes of the developing lands for conditions which will enable their peoples to lead full and human



lives. Added to this is the rising consciousness that the peoples of the developing lands have of themselves as marginalized, and the increasing clarity with which they see that, like the other and more privileged peoples of the world, they must hold the reins of their own destiny. No doubt Marxism has served to enhance this conviction, albeit containing its own hidden agenda. But the masses of the underprivileged find it difficult if not impossible to see any alternative, to Marxism, and it is not to be wondered that they fall for its promises. It is felt, further, that the term "development" contains hidden agenda of a type inimical to the well-being of the marginalized peoples. There are not lacking those who would tendentiously cultivate this conviction.

Thus, it is held by liberation theologians that the term "liberation" is far more relevant as a leitmotif for the developing world. It carries the meaning of self-determination-of marginalized persons coming to live and work, not as passive observers of events, but as agents of history. It is widely felt that development has not, and cannot, offer guidance of this type, and that a new perception of roles can be afforded only by an ideology which enhances man's self-perception as a creative subject.

While "development" originally connoted economic achievement, it has been extended to include cultural and social progress as well. But Latin Americans feel that the North has persisted in putting economic progress in place of social improvement. This revolutionary groups feel they must oppose. Consumerism, especially, is faulted for this same error. At Medellin, there was quoted with approval Marx's observation to the effect that "The production of too many useful things results in the creation of too many useless people."<sup>13</sup> Medellin condemned the consumer-oriented society in the name of a voluntarily assumed poverty. This mood would thus repudiate development as a proper Leitmotif for Latin American socioeconomic progress today.

### **Violence**

One of the most tendentious usages of language by advocates of the Liberation Theology is that of the term "violence." They customarily employ the word with some such qualifying adjective as "systemic," "structural" or "institutionalized." The usual meaning in such cases is that any use of force, whether physical, economic or psychological, is to be regarded as violence if it leads to inequities in society or to unfair dominance by any system or persons over one set or group of individuals.

The Cardiff Consultation of the World Council of Churches elaborates this use (or misuse) of the term "structural violence" to characterize the uneven distribution of vital resources or the concentration of resources in the hands of a privileged group, leading either to dominance over other nations, or to the exploitation of the underprivileged in their own society. In this view, overt force need not be present in a situation of violence. Although no one should deny that there is injustice in such situations, we may properly question whether the unjust situation legitimates the use of the term "violence" here, at least in a univocal manner. With its almost compulsive desire to ingratiate itself with the Third World, conciliar Christianity tends to be closed-minded here in favor of the more sweeping use of the term.

Apart from the semantic issues two problems stem from this usage. First, it renders ambiguous any exercise of coercion by legitimate governments, for aggrieved persons may equate any use of powers of coercion with structural or institutionalized violence. Second, the identification of violence with injustice affords an easy justification for revolutionary counter violence, for it tends to equate any maintenance of law and order with structural violence in support of the status quo.

Advocates of this definition of the term "violence" frequently maintain that the concept is an analytical tool, employed in specialized situations, in which injustice is maintained by the guardians of the established order, to rally support for any and all measures required for an answering use of counter violence. However, the indiscriminate identification of injustice with violence fails to take into account the ambiguities involved in the use of force in current society. We are inclined to agree with Paul Ramsey, that rather than call all unjust forms of socio-economic configuration "violent," we apply the term "gravely unjust" to those societies which actually institutionalize inequity.<sup>14</sup> Those who oppose Ramsey at this point seem to do so largely on the ground that the words "gravely unjust" fail to carry the impact or emotional weight borne by the term "violence."<sup>15</sup>

From the practical point of view, two observations may be in order. First, the more inclusive use of the term "violence" seems to foster a violence-prone mentality. Second, in much of Latin American thought, counter violent forms of reaction to injustice, such as guerilla activity, seem to have lost much of their romantic appeal, since the death of Che Guevara, and more especially, the death of Camilo Torres. The latter is said to have turned to guerilla activity only as a last resort, when he felt all other means had failed.

### **Conscientization**

The term "conscientization," which is reportedly a horror to experts in the English language, is a neologism which has been brought into currency in connection with Latin American Liberation Theology by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian now living in exile. The term emerged from Freire's experimentation with education in northwestern Brazil. Beginning with programs for literacy, he perceived early that literacy was no isolated element, but that it was integrally related to reform movements which were gaining momentum in all of Latin America. He saw, further, that illiteracy and socio-economic conservatism were causally related, and that the limitation of educational possibilities to the upper classes was a technique used by privileged elites to maintain and foster unjust situations. Where it was impossible to prevent general education, thought Freire, the creole elite manipulated the schooling of the youth of underprivileged classes to their own interest.

Fearing that his work of cultivating literacy, especially at the adult level, was being utilized to spread subversive ideas and to foster social revolt, the Brazilian government in 1963 forced Freire into exile. It was at this point that the concept of conscientization took mature shape. The term was soon taken over by others, and has been defined in several ways, some friendly, some unfriendly. Some see it as a simple synonym for "consciousness building." Others define it in terms of its objective of reversing the internalization of negative cultural myths by oppressed people. The

noted sociologist Peter Berger terms it "the cognitive preparation for revolutionary activity."<sup>16</sup> J. G. Davies terms it "an awakening of the critical consciousness which produces an experience of social discontent."<sup>17</sup> Another seeks to define the term by asking and answering two questions: first, Whose consciousness? The Masses. Second, By whom raised? The Vanguard.

To understand Freire's concept of conscientization, which concept has been adopted widely since his exile in the vernacular of the Liberation Theology in Latin America, one needs to note his understanding of levels of consciousness. He terms the lowest of these levels "intransitive consciousness," by which he means the bondage of the masses in what may be called a one-dimensional state of oppression. To those bound in this level, biological needs otherwise seen at a minimal level occupy the entire stage of human attention, while there is lacking any perspective of history in which change might be envisioned.

The second level Freire terms "semi-intransitivity" or "magical consciousness." This, he thinks, is the form of consciousness which prevails in the societies of the Third World. It is, basically, a form of consciousness which is fatalistic-which accepts closed societies, socio-economic forms of status quo, and an overall form of pessimistic givenness in life. It tends institutionally to national inferiority complex, and an accompanying tendency to accept dependence as a law of life.

The second level does, of course, parallel the analytical form of Marx, who saw society, not only in polarization (between oppressor and oppressed), but also as reflecting a "superstructure-infrastructure" relationship. It may and frequently does give way, thinks Freire, to a third form of consciousness, called "naive" or "semitransitive." Here the lower levels of society begin to articulate. Instead of perceiving reality as determined by destiny or fate, persons begin to see that the social, economic and cultural environment is created by persons. In consequence they begin to envision the taking of some of the instruments of control into their own hands.

The highest level of consciousness is for Freire that of "critical consciousness," in which men and women begin to investigate critically their problems, and to develop ability to shoulder responsibility for their own destiny. This level is produced by the process of conscientization, which begins in the rejection of all forms of dehumanization by oppressive structures. The aim of conscientizing education is to produce radical criticism not only of the structures themselves, but of the theoretical justification for them. Integral to this is a new awareness of grievances, and a new willingness to move into the element of praxis, which is seen as an authentic union of reflection and action.

Conscientization thus appears as an educational methodology, designed to bring a uniting of knowledge of one's interests with a willingness to take steps to secure and achieve these interests. Thus it is a mode of education which enlarges the awareness of the presence and work of oppressive institutions, and produces an acute sense of being outrageously marginated. It is clear that this has profound implications for education, particularly in Latin America. Learning and facts are to be brought together in terms of praxis, which involves these basic steps:

awareness of one's concrete (and exploited) situation, understanding of the historical elements by which this situation has come to exist, awareness of the possibility that this situation may be changed, and by which means, and willingness to act to produce such change. Thus, conscientization is a process which utilizes the dialectic between reflection and action, leading to a radical rejection of one reality, and proclaiming a new reality to take its place.

This crucial term in Latin American Liberation Theology suggests radical indoctrination against a prevailing order, and in favor of one so radically different that it seems incapable of being achieved in any manner short of violent and cataclysmic revolution. Whether the extension of Marxism as an analytical tool to its employment as a working ideology will follow as an inescapable result in Latin America remains to be discovered.

Finally, we note a definition of our term by one of the major leaders in the form of theology under discussion, Gustavo Gutierrez: Conscientization, in practical application, leads to a situation in which "the oppressed themselves can freely and creatively express themselves in society and among the people of God, until they are the artisans of their own liberation. . . ."18

### **Politicizing and Politicization**

While these terms are not favorites with liberation theologians, they do appear occasionally in primary sources and rather more frequently in writings by critics of this theological form. A case in point appeared in the February 19, 1979 issue of *Worldview*, which featured a study entitled "A Politicized Christ" by Edward R. Norman. Norman cites as a background the gathering of assorted Christians at Nairobi for the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches. In a flamboyant speech, Dr. Robert McAfee Brown, in gentle self-flagellation, acknowledged not having "made Jesus political enough," and proceeded to confess the sins of the Bourgeois world. Norman then spells out the current meaning-and extent-of politicization of the Christian Evangel.

The term "politization" as currently used does not refer simply to the introduction into political activity of Christian spokespersons. This phenomenon has been, in varying degrees, characteristic of Christians from the earliest times, and more so as the Church developed within relatively free societies, within which believers might speak out on matters of social concern. The word denotes rather, "the internal transformation of the faith itself, so that it comes to be defined in terms of political values-it becomes essentially concerned with social morality rather than the ethereal qualities of immortality. "19

Such a process does of course involve a conceptual framework; this is, in the cage of Latin American Liberation Theology, furnished negatively by the reaction against the developed world, and affirmatively (we think) by the frank adoption of the Marxist model-ostensibly for purposes of analysis. Reflecting a readily justified anger against the practices of the North vis-a-vis its neighbors to the South, Christian leaders of the Latin world have been directed to re-define their religious values and categories by terms which seem, from the biblical standpoint, to reflect a moralism derived from secular sources and only obliquely Christian. That is to say,

the measuring rod of the newer "doing of theology" becomes the secularized values of contemporary liberal culture. Supposing themselves to be bringing Christian values as a critique upon their current predicament, these theologians seem rather to make the modern secular consciousness to be the ultimate criterion for theology-for religious truth.

It is an easy step from the acceptance of the modern secular consciousness as a dominant criterion, to the selection of an analytical model which is only in the most remote sense compatible with the ideals of revealed Christianity. Thus, one can understand, from this perspective, the attractive power of the Marxist model. The increasing secularization and politicizing of all values in today's society reduces in increasing measure the power of the transcendent in the public consciousness. And the vacuum which this creates brings a favorable climate for the acceptance of whatever ideology is advanced in the name of the humanizing of society and the development of humanness within society.

Politicization is a process affecting in a large way the clergy, both individually and as a class. This is crucial for the Church in Latin America, since it can easily lead to a total reinterpretation of Christianity. Opinions differ with respect to the impact, present and future, of politicization upon the Church, with a significant number of observers feeling that Politicized clergy have an effect out of proportion to their numerical strength. That is to say, many find it to be chiefly a phenomenon among upper echelon, especially conciliar, clergy who tend, in Latin America as elsewhere, to speak largely for themselves, and to be relatively out of touch with the grass-roots of the religious life. In any case, politicization is the clerical counterpart of the process of conscientization.

### **Orthopraxis and Praxis**

Two other terms which form part of the colloquial vocabulary of Latin American Liberation Theology are orthopraxis and praxis. The former of these is frequently set in antithesis to the term "orthodoxy." In this usage it is strongly implied that "actions speak more loudly than words" and that those who seek to maintain right belief frequently manifest ethical blind spots, especially in situations in which they have a vested interest in the continuation of structures of injustice. Certainly it cannot be denied that Evangelicals have been open to this allegation, and that the holding of correct belief is frequently a substitute for the kind of attitudes and actions which correct doctrine ought to inspire.

Praxis is, of course, a term oriented toward action, as opposed to a course oriented in the direction of reasoned posturing. Orthopraxis is, in turn, the correct form of praxis, at which one may inquire, Who can select the correct form? Latin American theologians have not been hesitant in their suggestions at this point. Correct praxis inheres in being opposed to all that negates the freedom of the peoples, and especially the margined peoples, in the Latin American republics. This implies, as Hugo Assmann suggests in his *Theology for a Nomad Church*, being anti-imperialistic, antitechnocratic, and (on a national scale) anti-oligarchic.<sup>20</sup> As a paradigm, the same writer suggests that "Jesus and the prophets opposed the cultism and legalism of orthodoxy with the orthopraxis' of truth made history by means of effective action in the world."<sup>21</sup>

Of major importance here is the intention of liberation theologians to be reflective, not in any rationalistic or system-making manner, but in the sense of being analytic with respect to underlying realities. Their first concern is with those realities which deprive men and women of the freedom and opportunity to achieve a self-respecting direction of their own destinies. Orthopraxis is, in this light, action dictated by the need to move away from the enslaving model of development, and in the direction of what Assmann calls "a new polarization of thought and action" (italics his).<sup>22</sup> Thus is to be produced a "praxiology" of liberating faith in the world.

Practice thus becomes the inescapable starting point for the doing of a liberating theology. "Reflection ceases to have a world of its own and becomes simply a critical function of action."<sup>23</sup>

Here some will perceive the two terms under discussion as a sort of anti-language, which proclaims truth within the narrow limits of that which serves liberating purposes. It resists all traditional dogmatism, particularly with respect to the canons of the past, and all a priori forms making claim to being truth. In this anti-language only the taking of risks and the fulfillment of commitment can be regarded to be legitimate human ways of doing.

### **And in Conclusion**

In the light of the foregoing, it is possible to draw some generalizations, particularly on the points of contact or conflict between Latin American Liberation Theology and the historic Wesleyan manner of formulating theology. It should be said, first, that this Latin American form is not merely a revised version of the social gospel. The latter came from within an advantaged group, whereas the theology of liberation has emerged as a movement of disadvantaged groups-or of their spokesmen.

Liberation theology is the result of serious reflection on the meaning of Christian faith-made within a specialized context in which the prevailing religious climate of marginated peoples is nominally Christian, rather than non-religious. It seeks to offer a reasoned belief that its claims are appropriate to a true Christian witness, and that they are shaped by a liberal commitment to a humanized existence. Certainly the objectives are laudable, and in harmony with historic Wesleyan concern for the uniting of personal and social holiness.

Liberation Theology as we have discussed it is, in reality, a certain way of "doing theology." As such, it shares the weakness (we believe) of most of the allegedly dynamic modes of "doing theology," namely that of rationalizing positions already taken. It assumes, rather uncritically it seems to some of us, that Christian theology exists basically for its liberating praxis, this being too frequently defined rather narrowly.

More specifically, it seems to many that it unduly minimizes the metaphysical aspects of Christian theology, especially the nature and being of God. It opts too easily for God's existential significance. It is noteworthy that even a process theologian like Schubert Ogden senses this as a grave weakness.<sup>24</sup> Actually, with the exception of Juan Luis Segundo, liberation theologians ignore or bypass the major question of the existence and nature of the Almighty.<sup>25</sup> This leads, of course, to a narrow understanding of Christian missions, and indeed of the Mission of the Church.

Liberation Theology as has been here under observation differs widely from historic Wesleyan understanding of theological discourse in that it tends to be too restricted in its understanding of the larger question of the many bondages from which liberation is needed, e.g., the more subtle forms of bondage which touch both personal and social living. Notable among such bondages is that by which those who are "carnal and sold under sin" remain that way.

Finally, this form of theology, like most conventional forms of theology, fails to take with sufficient seriousness the fact that all who take to heart the Christian witness find alienation from existent systems to be "the normal existence for the people of God."<sup>26</sup> Liberation theology seeks to establish its own form of "being conformed to this world," forgetting that all empirical societies, even those with Marxist bases, are earthbound, and omit a dimension which will, at least in "the hour of our deaths," overshadow in importance all others. This dimension tends, in this theology as elsewhere, to become lost in the maze of the confusions which modern complex society produces. The primary significance of the life to come, and the emphasis upon the possession by each human being of "a never-dying soul to save and fit it for the sky," are the points that our own tradition needs consciously to maintain in the face of the myriad voices of secularity in our time.

---

#### NOTES

1James Thomas O'Connor, *Liberation: Towards a Theology for the Church in the World, According to the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellin, 1968* (Rome: Of ficium Libri Catholici, 1972), p. 14.

2Ibid., p. 63.

3Gustavo Gutierrez and M. Richard Schaul, *Liberation and Change* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), p. 69.

4Ibid., p. 70.

5Ibid., p. 71.

6Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis, 1976).

7Richard J. Neuhaus, "Liberation Theology and the Captivities of Jesus," in *Mission Trends No. 3: Third World Theologies*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 51.

8Ibid., p. 56.

9Ibid., p. 57.

10Schubert Ogden, *Faith and Freedom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 99.

11Thomas M. McFadden, ed., *Liberation, Revolution and Freedom, Theological Perspectives, Proceedings of the College Theology Society* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 16.

12Gutierrez, "The Hope of Liberation," in *Mission Trends No. 3*, p. 68.

13O'Connor, *Liberation. Towards a Theology*, pp. 93f.

- 14Paul Ramsey, "The Betrayal of Language," *Worldview*, February 1971, pp. 8f.
- 15John Gordon Davies, *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), pp. 134f.
- 16Peter Berger, "The False Consciousness of 'Consciousness Raising,' " in *Mission Trends No. 4: Liberation Theologies in North America and Europe*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 97.
- 17Davies, *Christians, Politics*, p. 100.
- 18Gutierrez, "The Hope of Liberation," p. 69.
- 19Christianity and Crisis, February 19, 1979, p. 18.
- 20Hugo Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1975), p. 34.
- 21Ibid p. 35.
- 22Ibid., p. 50.
- 23Ibid., p. 74.
- 24Ogden, *Faith and Freedom*, pp. 47-53.
- 25Ibid., p. 71.
- 26Jim Wallis, "Liberation and Conformity" in *Mission Trends No. 4* p. 55.



# MALE HEADSHIP IN PAUL'S THOUGHT

by

Fred D. Layman

Paul's teaching regarding women provides the greatest problematic for Christian writers of feminist literature,<sup>1</sup> and indeed for all of us who attempt to work from a base in the New Testament when we deal with such matters as the relations between the sexes and with marriage. Feminist authors are quite comfortable with Jesus' attitude toward women and commonly insist that His teachings and example in this regard must be the point of reference for judging the validity of all other biblical passages.<sup>2</sup> The patriarchal cultural situation<sup>3</sup> and the provisional character of the Old Testament are generally assumed so that that part of the canon poses no great difficulty. In the rest of the New Testament apart from Paul's writings, only one other passage, 1 Peter 3:1-7, requires attention. Most of the interpretive problems emerge within the Pauline corpus.

Since the Pauline letters are part of the New Testament which Christians receive as an authoritative point of reference, and since Paul had more to say about existence in the new creation, and about a life-style which corresponds to that existence, than any other New Testament writer, his thought cannot be passed over easily nor regarded as unimportant. For these reasons Christian authors of feminist literature make sincere attempts to understand the Apostle and to correctly interpret the relevance of his ideas for the present. This essay is one more such attempt in the ongoing discussion.

## **The Problem Stated**

The problem comes to focus on the fact that Paul apparently made contradictory statements as to the status of women and wives in the new creation begun in Christ. One set of his ideas belongs to his affirmation that in the new order "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). This seems to mean that the social distinctions and relationships belonging to the old order have now been transcended in Christ. With reference to women it would seem to imply that the social, religious and marital barriers which for centuries had functioned to oppress and dehumanize them have been removed. This is confirmed by the emphasis on

the equality of women to men which emerges in numerous ways in the epistles. A significant number of women responded to Paul's preaching, some of whom became his fellow workers in ministry. The list of persons greeted by the Apostle in Romans 16 singled out eight women by name and the nature of their ministries was recognized. Such persons as Phoebe (Rom. 16:1f.) and Priscilla (Acts 18) carried out important administrative and ministerial functions in conjunction with Paul's work. Other such women included Lydia (Acts 16:13-15, 40), Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2), Nympha (Col. 4:15) and Apphia (Philemon 1f.), who entered into the ministry of Paul in various supportive ways. Paul affirmed a wide range of ministerial offices and functions in connection with these and other women, including deacon (Rom. 16:1), helper (administrative assistant, Rom. 16:2), fellow worker (Rom. 16:3; Phil. 4:2f.), prophet (1 Cor. 11:5), teacher (Titus 2:3), possibly also elder (1 Tim. 5:2) and apostle (Rom. 16:7).

But in spite of this kind of evidence that Paul perceived the realities of the new situation in Christ and that he affirmed the new status of women and their role in ministry, other statements in his writings seem to nullify this outlook and portray the Apostle as imposing anachronistic religious and social mores on the Christian community. Whether or not this is true is another matter, but at least since the second century numerous interpreters have appealed to Paul for New Testament support for enforcing the subordination of women in the home, in society, and in the church.

This points up the fact that several of the Pauline passages have been understood to advocate a hierarchical arrangement of men and women in a chain-of-command pattern of God-Christ-man-woman. Domestically, this involves submissive obedience on the part of the wife to the husband. Religiously, women are prohibited from speaking in worship services, having authority over men, or teaching men. Socially, women have prescribed roles limiting them to housekeeping and mothering. Paul is said to have supported his commands in these areas by appeals to the order of creation, the moral order, natural law, Jewish tradition and ecclesiastical rules. The main Pauline roof texts appealed to are 1 Corinthians 11:3-16; 14:34f.; Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Timothy 2:9-15; and Titus 2:3-5.

One Pauline metaphor in particular has been appropriated as scriptural evidence for the continuation of male dominance and female subordination in the new creation, i.e., the idea of the headship of the male. Paul's use of the metaphor is found in Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Corinthians 11:3-16. The purpose of what follows is to examine those two passages in their theological and historical contexts in order to arrive at an understanding of what Paul meant by male headship.

The thesis I wish to develop is that Paul did not use the idea of male headship in a governmental nor ontological way as establishing a hierarchical relationship between male and female in which the one was dominant and the other submissive. Rather, he used it (1) to designate the proper relationship between the sexes in the context of the new order, and (2) to insist on the continuation of sexual distinctions and the validity of marriage in the new creation in a polemic with gnostic claims to the contrary.

## The Theological and Historical Context

All of Paul's theology is rooted in his belief that Christ's advent, death and resurrection signalled the beginning of eschatological times and conditions.<sup>4</sup> The Christ-event marks the arrival of the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10). Eschatological salvation, looked for in the future in the Old Testament and in Judaism, has broken into the present in Christ (2 Cor. 6:2). The new world of the re-creation has dawned and men of faith participate in it (2 Cor. 5:17). The church is the community of the new creation, formed by the eschatological Spirit.<sup>5</sup> It has been called out of a fallen world to become the new order of humanity, the church (*ekklesia*) of God (1 Cor. 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 3:15). As such, it has been liberated from the powers and structures which dominate the old order. This includes freedom from sin (Rom. 6:7, 18, 22; 8:2), freedom from the condemning and death-dealing functions of the law (Rom. 6:14; 7:4; Gal. 3:25), freedom from the dominion of demonic powers (Col. 2:15, 20; Gal. 4:3-7, 9), and freedom from the ascetic and legalistic regulations by which the world lives (Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 1:16-23; 1 Tim. 4:3-5). The old mode of existence has lost its control over those who are in Christ. They have their existence in the new order (Rom.6:2-6; Col.2: 11-13). In daily life they are to renounce the old and live by the new (Eph. 4:22ff.; Col. 3:9ff.). Their freedom is not directionless nor irresponsible. It is exercised "for God" (1 Cor.10:31) and "to God" (Col. 3:17). Paul nowhere envisions a freedom which is not in subservience to God. It is not a freedom to pursue fleshly or spiritual hedonism, but a freedom brought under the discipline of love (Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23f.; Rom. 14:15).<sup>6</sup>

But as much as Paul insisted on the beginning of eschatological realities in the Christ-event, he did not claim that the new age had been fully realized. A tension exists between the "already" and the "not-yet" in his theology. The final resurrection, the judgment, the return of the King with His kingdom, and the Day of the Lord await the future. In the meantime, two ages overlap and are parallel with each other. Sin and death have not yet been destroyed. The old age has not been terminated as a historical reality. Demonic powers constantly confront members of the new creation, challenging their freedom (Eph. 6:10-18).

The dawn of the new creation had radical consequences for the social order, according to Paul. Three times in his writings he stated that entry into the Christian community destroyed the national, social, religious and sexual barriers in which the old creation lives (1 Cor. 12:12f.; Gal. 3:26-28; Col. 3:9-11). The passage which is of most importance here is Galatians 3:26-28:

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

On the one hand this meant the end of some things. It meant the end of life based on hostility, aggression, and repression-life which perpetuated itself by dominating, exploiting, possessing and manipulating others. These are characteristic of the old order (Eph. 4:17-32; Col.3:5-11). It meant

further the elimination of social structures which have served to perpetuate exploitive relationships and to institutionalize subservience of one group to another in the national, racial, economic, religious, and marital orders.<sup>7</sup> It meant the end of "superior" and "inferior" persons within these orders. The privileged status of Jews, free men, and males was brought to an end. Assigned spheres of work and ministry which were based on social, religious, and sexual differences were no longer significant.<sup>8</sup>

But the arrival of the new order in Christ also meant the creation of some new relationships. Gentiles, slaves and women now stood on equal footing with Jews, free men, and males as fellow members of the new order. The Kingdom made no provision for second-class citizens. What Paul was saying is that a new humanity has been brought about in Christ in which each member stands equal with his neighbor. In contrast to the old order, the new people of God are to relate to each other in ways that are truly loving and fully human.<sup>9\*\*</sup> We who stand at the end of three centuries of democracy, two centuries of abolition and labor reform, and a century of women's suffrage and liberation movements cannot feel the full impact and radical sense of newness that Paul's words had with his world, both Jewish and Gentile.<sup>10</sup>

There were elements in the first-century Mediterranean world however who heard the words of Paul and the proclamation of the early church <sup>11</sup> in a twisted manner and took them in directions quite contrary to the Apostle's intent. Historical studies have increasingly shown the pervasive presence of Gnosticism in the background of several New Testament books, especially those which are important for this discussion-1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, and the Pastorals. At this stage Gnosticism was not so much a defined religious philosophy as it was a radical pneumatic disposition which was diffused throughout many religions including Judaism and Christianity.<sup>12</sup> It penetrated the membership, worship practices, and teachings of several congregations in the first and second centuries. It was syncretistic and took various forms and doctrinal stances and was far from being ideologically monolithic. It is possible however, within limits, to identify some of the beliefs and practices of gnostic groups that are singled out by various New Testament books.

The Gnostics held a dualistic view that emphasized the perfections of the heavenly world while deprecating everything which belonged to this world. The world of matter is completely under the control of demonic forces and is beyond redemption.<sup>13</sup> This cosmological dualism was paralleled with an anthropological dualism whereby man's spirit was exalted while his body was devalued.<sup>14</sup> Man's spirit is actually a spark of the divine spirit which had become imprisoned in a material body. Baptism into Christ meant for these Gnostics that the spirit was set free from and enabled to transcend bodily existence. The spirit was no longer under the power of this world, the flesh, nor the demonic, but was fully possessed by the divine spirit.

What the Gnostics were really advocating was a radical realized eschatology through which they were claiming that they had already attained the final perfection through resurrection in Christ. Their continued existence on earth was in reality only a temporal manifestation of their heavenly being. Their bodies no longer imprisoned their spirits. They had

transcended bodily existence and went about totally free of domination by the material and demonic orders. They boasted that they were endowed with spirit (*pneuma*) while others possessed only soul (*psyche*).<sup>15</sup>

Having reached the state of perfection, the Gnostics also claimed to be in possession of heavenly knowledge which was unmediated to them in any creaturely form but was theirs directly by revelation. Such perfect knowledge came to them through ecstatic visions and heavenly languages which suspended ordinary human ways of knowing. The preaching and teaching of these spiritually illuminated persons were to be accepted as truth because in reality they were the truth of the heavenly world delivered through perfected spirits.

These perfected persons appeared to have the same bodily existence as everyone else. But since their spirits were completely freed from their bodies, bodily existence was simply renounced. Ethically and morally this worked out in one of two directions: libertinism or asceticism. Some Gnostics flaunted their freedom from the rules of the lower order by indulging in every immoral and licentious vice, claiming that their perfected spirits were no more affected than gold is when it is dropped into filth. Other Gnostics took the path of ascetic denial of bodily desires. This included avoiding or renouncing marriage, or couples living together without sexual contact. As opposite as these two courses might seem to be, they had in common a repudiation of the lower order, either through excess or through abstention.<sup>16</sup>

One other belief among the Gnostics is important for our consideration, the idea of androgyny. The pneumatic who has attained perfection and who belongs to the transcendent world is no longer a man or a woman. Those orders belong to this world. Spirit endowment obliterates such distinctions. That which appeared to be men and women was in actuality perfected spirits who were asexual.<sup>17</sup> By this doctrine, Gnosticism was one more of several religions which served as vehicles for the emancipation of females and, as a result, attracted large numbers of women.<sup>18</sup>

In the controversy that ensued, Paul and the Gnostics took their stances at different ends of the already/not-yet tandem. The Gnostics stressed the "already" of eschatological fulfillment. They had already attained spirit endowment and perfection by their resurrection in Christ. All that remained was the final separation of the spirit from the body before entry into perpetual ecstasy, and that was thought to be imminent. However, they were even now participating in the heavenly realm temporarily when the spirit left the body in moments of ecstatic vision and revelation.<sup>19</sup> In the meantime, they were already liberated from the lower order-its wisdom, its rules, and its social structures.

Against such pretensions Paul emphasized the "not-yet" of eschatological fulfillment. Participation in the new creation introduced the equivalence of persons in the natural orders, but it did not eliminate their distinctions. The racial identities and appearances of Jews and Gentiles remained (1 Cor. 7:17-20). The creation distinction between male and female was not altered by androgynous assimilation or transcendence of sexual differences (1 Cor. 7:12).<sup>20\*\*</sup> These natural distinctions have only relative significance however for the new creation and the relationships of persons within it. They do not stand in the way of faith or service to God. Since

believers have a new identity in Christ, they must guard against becoming the slaves of men, i.e., by attaching any significance to human social prejudices (1 Cor. 7:22f.).<sup>21</sup>

Paul argued even further that the new creation has not dispensed with existing social structures. Marriages were to remain intact in so far as the believing partners have responsibility (1 Cor. 7:12-17, 27), and new marriages could be contracted (1 Cor.7:9, 28).<sup>22</sup> Jews were not to efface their circumcision nor were Gentiles to seek circumcision (1 Cor. 7:17-20). Slaves were not to be concerned about their status in relation to participation in the new order, although they could take advantage of any opportunity for freedom which was offered to them (1 Cor. 7:21-24; Eph. 6:5f.; Titus 2:9f.).<sup>23</sup>

The Apostle thus did not advocate nor permit (1 Cor. 7:17) any premature encroachments on the existing social order. The gospel did not come as a new social program nor as a rallying cry to overthrow the social order by force. But neither did it merely baptize the status quo. Rather it began to penetrate the structures of society, permeating them with the spirit of Christ, and working to eliminate their dehumanizing features.<sup>24</sup> This was more than a matter of propriety with Paul, growing out of fears of reprisals from the Roman state or a concern to avoid unnecessary scandal. Rather, he wanted to affirm the created order as God's order. Human society is more than human disobedience and the sinful abuse of power. It is also the arena within which God has chosen to realize His purpose. Contrary to the Gnostics and Jewish apocalyptists, Paul insisted that the secular order has not been abandoned to the demonic. It is the sphere through which God chooses to effect His lordship. That doesn't mean that its structures are divine or unalterable; none of the ones Paul listed in Galatians 3:28 is based on a divine ordinance except the male-female distinction.<sup>25</sup>

But even more, Paul was convinced that the divine intent was to transform the existing structures by the power of the gospel and the presence of the new creation. The best intent of God in the orders of creation-male-female, work, government, and religion-were twisted by alienated men to serve the powerful and to exploit the weak. In bringing about change however, God doesn't plant dynamite; He kneads in leaven the leaven of the Kingdom of God. Paul concluded that God purposes to set the new creation in the midst of the old, redeemed people in the midst of the fallen, love in the midst of hostility, self-basement in the midst of selfassertion, submission in the midst of domination, to humanize and redeem the fallen structures.<sup>26</sup>

This then was the theological and historical context within which Paul spoke to the matter of male headship and female subjection. The intent has been to take his words out of the realm of the abstract in order that they might be seen and understood in the concrete situation within which they were first spoken and, in turn, become more relevant for us today. This background having been laid, we are now ready to consider the matter of male headship in Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Corinthians 11:3-16.

### **Husbands and Wives: Ephesians 5:21-33**

This passage has commonly been understood to establish a hierarchical order of authority in a chain-of-command: God-Christ-man-woman. This is

sometimes referred to as a "kephale-structure"<sup>27</sup> which was established at the creation and intensified at the fall, governing all subsequent relationships between the sexes.<sup>28</sup> In the relationship, man is the "head," i.e. "that which is prior, that which determines, that which leads. The head is the power that begins, it is principium, arche."<sup>29</sup> Woman is "from" the man and is sub-ordered to him, determined by him and follows him. This role relationship is not polar; it is not reversible.<sup>30</sup>

Some interpreters press this principle beyond a governmental structure and regard it as an ontological structure determining not only how men and women are to relate, but also what they are. Calvin, commenting on 1 Timothy 2:12, observed that women "by nature are born to obey men."<sup>31</sup> The opposite side of this is that men by nature are born to govern women. This viewpoint still appears from time to time.<sup>32</sup>

Interpretations of this sort fasten on to the headship and subjection language in the Ephesians 5 passage. Two analogies are drawn upon and then elaborated to support the premise: the head/body and the Christ/ church motifs. The head/body elaboration proceeds with a physiological analogy suggesting that the relationship between a husband and wife corresponds to the function of the human head with reference to the body. The head (and by analogy, the husband) is the most prominent part of the body and carries out the thinking, decision-making, and directing function for the body (and by analogy, the wife). The body (wife) is in subjection to the head (husband) and carries out its (his) directives.

This interpretation runs into difficulty at several points. To begin with, the function of the head (brain) in rational processes was not known prior to the rise of modern science. The ancients didn't have the remotest idea of the function of the brain and the nervous system and attributed psychical functions to the soul, the spirit, or to other parts of the body-the heart, the bowels, the kidneys, the bones, etc.-but never to the head.<sup>33</sup> It was thus impossible for Paul to make use of this analogy in his time and would have been meaningless to his readers if he had.

But even more significant is the fact that Paul simply nowhere uses the head-body language in analogy with a physiological model. He did use a physiological model when he spoke of the church as the body of Christ in contexts where the idea of headship is absent (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 2:19). Likewise, Paul spoke of the "head" in a metaphorical sense in isolation from reference to a body (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22; Col. 2:10). But he used the metaphors to say two different things: the body metaphor addressed the matter of the mutuality of Christian relationships within the believing community; the head metaphor spoke of Christ as the source, beginning, savior, and conserver of the church. The two metaphors do not change these meanings when they are brought into proximity to each other, and to interpret them in correspondence to a physiological model is to create numerous absurdities. Ephesians 4:16 and Colossians 2:19 refer to the church as the "whole body" which, if a physiological model is intended, would have two heads. Nor would the language about the body growing up into the head (Eph. 4:15) make any sense.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the physiological interpretation breaks down because Paul does not refer here to the wife as the "body" of the husband, who is the head. There is a correspondence in the passage between  
Christ-husband (vs.

52 23f.) and church-wife (vs. 23f.). There is also a correspondence between Christ as head of the church and the husband as head of the wife (v.23). But there is no stated correspondence between the church as Christ's body and the wife as the husband's body, which would be present if a physiological model were in view.<sup>35\*\*</sup> In verse 28, the body is not a reference to the wife but rather to the husband's own body.<sup>36</sup>

The second Pauline motif drawn upon as a basis for the hierarchical interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33 is the Christ/church analogy. The reasoning proceeds as follows: the relation of the wife to the headship of her husband is to correspond to the relation of the church to the headship of Christ. Or, stated in the opposite manner, the headship of the husband over his wife is to correspond to the headship of Christ over the church. The repeated use of the word "as" in the passage (vs. 22-24, 28f., 33) reinforces the argument. Let it be conceded here that that is exactly what Paul says! The problem arises when the interpreters do not abide by the limits that Paul places on the comparison here and treat the word "as" as though it were open-ended. Having picked up on the word "as," the interpreters then scour the rest of the New Testament in order to arrive at an understanding of what the relationship between Christ and the church involves. The answer is then read back into the Ephesian passage. The answer is most usually in terms of Lord-servant, involving the related ideas of command-obedience and dominance-submission. Headship is thus invested with an authoritarian connotation which is then reinforced by appeals to verses 22f. where lordship, submission, and headship are drawn into close proximity to each other.<sup>37</sup>

There is no question but that the relationship between Christ and the church involves lordship and submission in the New Testament. But the question still remains: is that the thrust Paul intended here in his use of the idea of headship? I think not. The fact is that Christ's headship and Christ's lordship are two different, though related, ideas for Paul. Paul's metaphorical use of the word *kephale* corresponds to a like use of the word *rosh* in the Old Testament, both meaning the "beginning," "source," or "ground" of something.<sup>38</sup> In Colossians 1:15-20, for instance, Christ was the beginning of the natural creation (v. 16), which has its origin and ground in Him and achieves its final destiny in relation to Him (v. 17). He has a relationship of priority and sustainer to the creation (v. 18). He was also the beginning of the church and was the first-born of the new order. He is thus pre-eminent in the original creation and in the new creation (v. 18). The new creation has its origin and ground in Him (v.18). He has this role as a divine being (v. 19, cf. 2:9). God intends to reconcile all things in Him (v. 20) Because He is the source and ground of all creation, He is also the source of all rule and authority (2:10). Ephesians contains a comparable set of ideas. Ephesians 1:21f. parallels Colossians 1:18-20 in its emphasis on Christ's headship in the new creation, a headship that extends to all things and is above all rule, authority, power, and dominion. Ephesians 4:15f. and Colossians 2:19 emphasize the unity which exists between Christ and the church. He is the origin and ground of the church and directs its growth to Himself. The church is edified through His gifts and He is its eschatological orientation (Eph. 4:11-16). None of this can be attained however apart from faith;



for this reason the relation of the body to the head is always that of obedient submission.

All of this is said without any identification of Christ's headship and His lordship. The two ideas are drawn together in the Ephesians passage where the Lord Jesus Christ (vs.2f.,15,17; cf. Col.2:10) is exalted above all rule, authority, power, and dominion (v. 21), but they are not the same. Christ's headship speaks of Him as the beginning, origin, and ground of all being. His lordship speaks of His governing rule in the creation. Thus His lordship in the creation is the result of His headship, but the two ideas are not synonymous.

When we look again at the Ephesians 5:21-33 passage, it becomes obvious that Paul did not incorporate all that belongs to Christ's headship when he paralleled it with the husband's headship. He did not affirm that "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church" (v. 32) and leave it open-ended for his readers to fill in the specifics. Given the proclivity for fallen man to put himself in the place of God, Paul was very aware as he wrote of how his motif could be misused for sinful purposes. He was very careful therefore to circumscribe and limit his meaning.

The Pauline limitation may be seen at two points. First, Paul did not refer to the husband as "lord" of the wife in this passage. Christ's headship may extend into His lordship over the whole creation, as indicated above, but Paul did not extend the husband's headship to include lordship over his wife. Verse 22 is not to be understood to say that the wife has two lords or that the husband's headship is invested with the character of lordship over his wife. Rather, the Apostle admonished wives to be subject to their husbands as an act compatible with Christian service "to the Lord,"<sup>39</sup> i.e., on no other authority than that of Christ. It is obvious from this that Paul did not invest the headship of the husband with the meaning of "lordship" or hierarchical authority. Only Christ's headship, not His lordship, is held up as the model for the husband. Paul thus made use of the idea of headship in a narrow and restricted sense, i.e., that the wife as woman has her source or beginning from the man (v.23).<sup>40</sup> We are not free therefore to fill the word with meanings from the rest of the New Testament when Paul himself did not.

Secondly, Paul made very clear in the rest of this passage how far Christ's headship may be taken as a model for the headship role of the husband. Christ's headship toward the church was expressed as Savior (v. 23) in love (v. 25), self-sacrifice (v. 25), provision (vs. 26f.), nourishing (v. 29), and cherishing (v. 29). Indeed, the thought of the self-emptying of Christ (Phil. 2:5-8) permeates this passage as though Paul were saying to husbands "Have the mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). As Christ left His Father's house to take up obedient submission (Phil. 2:6,8), so the husband must leave the home of his parents and enter a relationship of commitment and mutual subjection with his wife (vs. 21, 33). In this way man and wife parallel the mystery of Christ and the church (v. 32). None of these actions and attitudes which Christ modeled involves the exercise of authority, rule, or dominance.<sup>41</sup> Paul thus refused to incorporate any authoritarian connotations into the husband's headship but rather specified it in terms of love, sharing, and commitment.

In addition to these limitations, Paul also reoriented the whole

conception of headship and subjection in a new and different direction. What tends to get lost in the discussions of Ephesians 5 is the fact that it was primarily directed to husbands.<sup>42</sup> Wives were told simply to be subject to their husbands in everything (vs. 21f., 24), and to show respect (v. 33) to them without further specification. That was nothing new to wives; they had heard that for centuries! What was radically new, and what transformed the whole relationship between husbands and wives was Paul's words to husbands. The innovative note was sounded from the opening verse in the section, a call for husbands to enter into the relationship of subjection with their wives (v. 21). Again, we are unable to feel the scandal of these words. In Paul's world the demand for subjection went only one way, to the wives. But for him, this was the way of the old order. The new order, in which the barriers between male and female have been removed (Gal. 3:28), is to be characterized by mutual submission of each partner to the other. The example has already been set by the head of the Church, Christ (vs. 25, 29), and that example is to be followed out of reverence to Him (v. 21).

But there are different kinds of submission. The word used here by Paul (*hupotasso*) was originally a hierarchical term which stressed the relation of subordinates to superiors. This involved power or conquest on the part of the superior and the lack of freedom or choice on the part of the subordinate. Subjection was thus forced upon the subordinate. Paul however used the word in an entirely different way. In Christian relationships, it is not the subjection of compulsion which is in view but a subjection which is voluntary, motivated not by the strictures of society nor by the demands of the recipient, but only by love for Christ (vs. 21f.). This lack of hierarchical connotation in connection with subjection is pointed up by the fact that in the New Testament, *hupotasso* does not immediately contain the thought of obedience.<sup>43</sup>

The kind of submission Paul talked about then was intertwined with love. It implied a readiness to renounce one's own will for the sake of others, to give precedence to others. For the Apostle there is no love apart from submission and submission is the natural outflow of love. Thus he immediately coupled the two with his second word to husbands: "let each one of you love his wife as himself" (v. 33; cf. v. 28). Here he invoked not only the example of Christ, but also the command of Christ in the Second Great Commandment (Mark 10:31). In the context of marriage, the wife is the neighbor whom the husband is to love as he loves himself. Love is the supreme obligation which members of the new creation owe each other (Rom. 13:8, 10) and which characterizes their mode of existence.<sup>44</sup>

It was in this way that the relationship of male and female came to be transformed in the new order. The wife was lifted in status to a position of equality with her husband whom she could love (Titus 2:4), to whom she could subject herself (Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5) without fear of exploitation. In the context of the times, this new position of women was little short of revolutionary.<sup>45</sup> The husband in turn was drawn out of the role of the tyrant, dominator, controller, and manipulator, into a relationship of love and self-giving corresponding to the pattern of Christ. This new situation permitted the couple to realize the divine intent in marriage and to work toward their own potential in a relationship of mutual reciprocity.<sup>46</sup> The old

authoritarian barriers were removed and Ephesians 5:21-33 stood in continuity with Galatians 3:28 and flowed out of it.

### **Men and Women in Ministry: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16**

The exegetical and interpretive problems in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 arise for three reasons. First, Paul used words here which occur very infrequently in koine Greek and in the rest of the New Testament with the result that we cannot always be certain of his intended meaning. Further, the passage refers to custom and practices which are vague to us, making it difficult to reconstruct with any degree of certainty the historical situation within the church at Corinth which provoked the apostolic directives to the church. Finally, Paul was answering questions put to him by members of the church. If we knew the content of those questions we could better understand the Apostle's answers. As it is, we have only one side of the conversation. For these reasons, attempts at interpretation can only proceed on the basis of the best historical information that we have.

The connecting link between Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 is the idea of male headship (v.3). But here the motif is addressed to the relationship between the sexes in the worship services.<sup>47</sup> The presence of the headship idea, along with a discussion of the priority of man to woman in the original creation (vs. 7f., 11f.), stated in the context of a consideration of the proper head adornment for women (vs. 4-7, 10, 13-15), has led many interpreters to assume that the subject of verses 3-16 is female subordination.<sup>48</sup> That interpretation begins with the premise that the headship language in verse 3 sets forth a hierarchy of authority in the God Christ-man (husband)-woman (wife) model. Paul's appeals to the creation narrative (vs. 8f.), it is alleged, further reinforced his argument for female subordination. The submission of the woman to the authority of the man was to be symbolized by the wearing of veils in the worship services.

But several problems arise in connection with this interpretation. To begin with, as we have seen above, Paul did not make use of the headship idea to speak of a hierarchy of authority and submission and there is no evidence that he did so here.<sup>49</sup> Rather, he used it to point to the fact that the woman has her source from the man in the divine creation. Standing as it does at the beginning of the passage, verse 3 thus has significance for the theme of the rest of the section.

In the second place, the word for "veil" (*halumma*) does not occur anywhere in the passage and it is doubtful whether such a uniform custom existed at Corinth during the first century. Gentile women typically did not wear veils in public and Greco-Roman customs in this regard were quite fluid and non-compulsory in nature.<sup>50</sup> Most of the historical information which we have on the practice of wearing veils in the ancient world comes from periods considerably before or after the first century. Jewish women in particular seem not to have worn veils which covered their faces until the second century and later.<sup>51</sup>

The intent of the passage therefore probably lies in a direction other than that of veil customs and the theme of the hierarchical relationship between men and women. This much is certain: the custom referred to had to do with the different head adornments which were appropriate for men and women in the context of liturgical functions within the congregation.

Paul's preoccupation with the head (vs. 4f., 7, 10, 13) and with hair (vs. 6, 14f.) makes this clear and provides the most obvious clue for identifying the practices at Corinth which he found objectionable. According to verses 14f., it is proper in the nature of things for men to have short hair and women to have long hair. Apparently certain men and women at Corinth were reversing the normal male and female hairstyles. In verse 15 it is said that a woman's long hair was given to her for a covering (*peribolaiou*).<sup>52</sup> Her hair served as a kind of headgear which distinguished her sex. During this period women customarily wore their hair long and pinned up as a covering for their heads.<sup>53</sup> Men, on the other hand, were not to pray or prophesy with long hair covering their heads in the style of women (vs. 4, 7). The word "cover" (*katahaluptesthai*, v. 7) does not refer to a veil or other head-covering. Contemporary Judaism had no prohibition against a man covering his head during public worship; in fact, the contrary has been the custom for centuries in Judaism. Further, according to Ezekiel 44:18, the priests in the restored temple were to wear a linen turban on their heads while leading worship. Paul was thus not objecting to men having head-coverings in the worship services, but rather to their wearing hairstyles which were inappropriate for men. Moreover, in the Old Testament the priests were prohibited from cutting their hair in ways which were characteristic of the adherents of other religions (Lev. 19:27; 21:5f.; Deut. 14:1). For Ezekiel (44:20), the priests in the new temple were neither to shave their heads nor to let their hair grow long, but were to cut it in the style of Jewish men at the time. Such prohibitions were based in the fact that cult associations were often symbolized by the manner in which the hair was cut and arranged in ancient times. Such practices were not only forbidden by the Old Testament but also by the Jewish rabbis.<sup>54</sup> The term "cover" (*katahaluptesthai*, v. 7) thus has reference to men covering their heads with long hair in the style of women (v. 15).<sup>55</sup> This was degrading to men (v. 14).

That Paul was referring to hairstyles becomes even more clear in verses 5f. Women were not to pray or prophesy with their heads uncovered (*akatakalupto*, v. 5; *ou katakaluptetai*, v. 6). The Septuagint used the same Greek words to refer to the case of a leper (Lev. 13:45) and a woman accused of adultery (Num. 5:18), with the meaning that their hair was to be loose and hanging down as a sign of their uncleanness and ceremonial defilement.<sup>56</sup> This meaning best fits the context of what Paul was saying here. Women were not to change their hair to styles other than those which were appropriate for women by letting their hair hang down loosely. Such was to bring dishonor to the woman (v. 5). The basis for this judgment is not made clear. The dishonor may have been associated with the significance of loose hair in a Jewish context, i.e., as the public sign of an adulteress (Num. 5:18).<sup>57</sup> Or it may have been connected with pagan religious practices where women wore their hair loose during the ceremonies.<sup>58</sup>

Whatever the context may have been, Paul viewed such practices as reprehensible. The dishonor and disgrace was the same as that of the woman whose head was shaved (vs. 5b-6). Here again, the basis of the disgrace is not stated. Shorn hair was a sign of mourning among the Jews (Job 1:20; Jer. 7:29), but it did not bear the character of disgrace.<sup>59</sup> Nor is

there sufficient evidence that shorn hair was the mark of a prostitute.<sup>60</sup> Rather, the association of long hair and shorn hair on women with alien religious practices is the most probable reason for Paul's objection.<sup>61</sup> The situation which begins to emerge is that some of the women in the church at Corinth-in celebration of the announced equality of the sexes in the new order <sup>62-</sup>proclaimed their new status by changing their hairstyles from those customarily worn by women, letting their hair hang loose. Other women went even further and cut their hair in the style of men.<sup>63</sup>

These practices were reported to Paul and his response was called for. Paul answered that logically if a woman persisted in appearing like a man, then she should cut her hair short like a man's.<sup>64</sup> Paul did not intend to countenance such practices, as is indicated in the remainder of verse 6. To celebrate equality between the sexes in this way was at the same time to create conflicts with existing social and religious mores which, in turn, gave rise to questions about their moral character. In the light of that fact, they were to abandon such practices and return to the use of hairstyles which were characteristic of women (v. 6b).

We may inquire even further as to the source of these practices among both men and women at Corinth, and as to the reason for Paul's strong exceptions. Certainly Paul was not responding to the situation as a rigid, elderly preacher who was unable to tolerate changing styles in dress and grooming. That would be grossly unfair to Paul. His concern may well have been that the gospel not be unnecessarily scandalized through irresponsible exercises of Christian freedom, as it had been in chapters 8 and 10 with regard to eating meats that had been offered to idols. His words in 10:31-11:1 embody this principle and serve to connect together the two themes of eating meat and proper head adornment for the sexes:

... Do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

But even further, Paul was objecting to hairstyles which were ideologically based in ideas that were contrary to the biblical revelation. These ideas and practices may well have been drawn from the gnostic claim that sexual differences had ceased to exist for those who had already attained perfection and spirit endowment. In addition to the denial of sexual differences and the continuing validity of marriage,<sup>65</sup> the androgynous doctrine in Gnosticism may have also involved homosexual practices among the ecstasies.<sup>66</sup> The reference in 6:9-11 makes it clear that some members of the congregation had been involved in homosexuality earlier, and the mention of long hair as a violation of "nature" (phases, v. 14) has overtones of a parallel repudiation of homosexuality in Romans 1:26f.

It would appear therefore that the best explanation for the motivation of Paul's words in 11:3-16 was the various gnostic teachings regarding the termination of the sexual distinctions between male and female and the consequences of these teachings for marriage and sexual practices. In the face of such claims, Paul again asserted the "not-yet" of eschatological fulfillment. In chapter 7 he had already defended the continuing validity of

marriage on this basis. In chapter 11 he asserted the continuation of sexual differences on the same basis. That is the common thread which ties together the several themes in this section-headship, head adornment, creation differences-rather than the theme of female subordination.

The headship motif in verse 3 thus served to point to the distinction between the sexes which was based on their origin. The male and the female originated at different times and the one had her origin from the other in the creative act. Paul was theologizing here on the basis of Genesis 2:18-23. Man is the head of woman in the sense that she has her historical derivation from him.<sup>67</sup>\*\* Adam was first with regard to time. That is as far as Paul took the point. He did not press it further to claim a priority of rank for man.<sup>68</sup> Here and in verses 7-9, Paul made clear that male and female were separate from their creation and did not emerge from a primal androgynous unity, as some Greek and Rabbinic interpreters concluded.<sup>69</sup>

Presumably one way of evidencing this relation of headship and the distinction between males and females in early Christianity was by the different head adornments worn by men and women. Paul knew from reports brought to him that both men and women were praying and prophesying in the public worship services and he did not raise an objection to that practice here.<sup>70</sup> But he did object to them appearing without the appropriate symbols of their sexual distinction (vs. 4-7). It was disgraceful for men to pray or prophesy with long hair, just as it was disgraceful for women to pray or prophesy with their hair hanging loose. The disgrace had nothing to do with women renouncing their subordinate status to men. The whole passage was addressed both to men and to women and was directed toward any practice by either sex which abridged sexual differences. The disgrace was based in the fact that such practices denied the headship relation of the sexes and their distinction from the creation. Such was in effect a repudiation of the male-female dualism in the created order.

The same point was made in verses 7-10, but this time based on an interpretation of the creation narrative both in Genesis 1:27 and 2:18-23. Paul's scriptural base was still Genesis 2:18-23, but he reached out to grasp one thought in Genesis 1:27: man was created in the image of God. In Jewish theology a close association existed between the image of God and God's glory which was bestowed upon man. Paul's real interest here was with the difference between the glory of man and the glory of woman as that idea had been developed in Jewish thought. The reason we find it so difficult to follow his logical processes here is because this theme was not developed in Christian theology. His use of Genesis 1:27 and the image of God idea was not to deny that woman was also created in the image of God, but to get the glory motif before his readers. Having introduced this idea, he then interpreted it from the order of creation in Genesis 2:18-23. The difference in the character of glory is expressive of the sexual difference between man and woman from the creation. Paul drove the point home in verses 8f.: "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." The different glories of man and woman were based in the order of their creation. Again, the emphasis is on the sexual distinction between men and women and not a qualitative judgment on superiority and inferiority, nor does it have anything to do with dominance and submission as an authority structure between them.<sup>71</sup>

Paul clinched his argument in verse 10 with a very enigmatic sentence: "That is why a woman ought to have a veil [literally, "authority"] on her head, because of the angels." What do the angels have to do with this matter of head-coverings in the worship service, and what is meant by "authority" (*exousia*) on the woman's head? These two questions have caused no end of consternation on the part of interpreters, and likewise, no end of novel answers.<sup>72</sup> The best opinion seems to be that the angels have watch over the created order to see that it is maintained and that the worship of God is carried out in a proper manner.<sup>73</sup> For women to function in the worship services in any manner that repudiates the natural distinction between the sexes is to violate the order of creation and is thus to offend the angels which watch over that order.

The word *exousia* does not refer to a veil nor to the authority of the husband over the wife. Rather, it is the authority which she is to "have" (*echein*, v. 10), not the authority of another which is exercised over her.<sup>74</sup> As used here, the word denotes the authority to prophesy. In the contemporary Jewish view, Moses received his revelation directly from God, but all other prophets received their message mediated through angels. This idea of the angels functioning as the mediators of God's revelation to prophets underlies what Paul said about prophetesses in this verse. The prophetess is to have the authority to prophesy because it has become obvious that the angels speak with her and constitute her a prophetess. The authority is to be placed "on her head" (v.10). Early Christian prophetism was not without limits or regulations; Paul's purpose was to establish regulations against unchecked religious spontaneity in this section of 1 Corinthians. Some form of church authorization for prophets became necessary in the context of numerous syncretistic religious cults. The authority "on the head" may have been a filet or headband which designated the woman as an approved prophet and symbolized her ordination and authorization to function in that capacity in the congregation.<sup>75</sup>

Through verse 10 Paul stressed the continuation of sexual distinctions within the new creation. Lest he be misunderstood as negating his larger emphasis on the equality of men and women and the reciprocity of their relationship in Christ, he hastened to restate that principle in verses 11f.: "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God." The word *plen* with which he began this statement is used to conclude a discussion and to emphasize what is essential.<sup>76</sup> Having established the natural and unalterable differences between men and women, he then turned to emphasize again the mutuality of their existence in God's purpose.<sup>77</sup> This was no afterthought on Paul's part, nor an embarrassed reversion to Jewish subordinationism, but rather is the theological climax of the chapter to this point.<sup>78</sup> This part of the chapter is a final attempt to affirm the continuation of sexual distinctions within the new order, as symbolized by appropriate apparel and proper worship practices, within the context of the larger fact of the equality of the sexes within the new order. This is the line of continuity which stretches throughout the whole section. As such, it has nothing to say about hierarchy and subordination in the relationships of men and women. Like Ephesians 5:21-33, this passage too stands in continuity with the equality proclaimed in Galatians 3:28.

## Conclusion

This study has focused on the idea of male headship in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians because this idea has been the major basis of appeal to support the claim that a divinely appointed governmental structure exists between men and women that creates a hierarchy in which the man is appointed to a position of authority over the woman and the woman to a position of submission to the authority of the man. The apparent discrepancy between this line of thought and Paul's proclamation of the equality of the sexes in Galatians 3:28 is explained by a convenient distinction between equality in salvation on the one hand, and assigned roles in the created order on the other.

I have attempted to show that this interpretation is deficient particularly at two points. First, it incorrectly reads into Paul's conception of headship governmental and authoritarian connotations that in fact are absent from Paul's thought by intention. Paul understood headship to mean that man was the source of woman and woman had her origin from man according to Genesis 2:18-25. The idea of headship does not serve a governmental function for Paul but is a basis for his claim, asserted against certain gnostic counterclaims, that sexual differences and marriage have a continuing role in the new order, in the purposes of God. If this interpretation is correct and Paul did not invest male headship with governmental meaning, then the whole hierarchical interpretation of Paul's thought in this connection collapses.

Secondly, I have concluded that the hierarchical interpretation cannot be squared with Galatians 3:28. In reality that interpretation does not change the status of women in the hierarchy. Their position is the same as it has been from the creation. The hierarchical interpretation attempts to ameliorate the situation and empty it of the potential for abuse by emphasizing the demand for love on the part of the man, but the woman is still subjected to a forced subordination. This in effect is to take away with the left hand what was given by the right. There is no way one can still speak of equality between the sexes and yet retain divinely appointed governmental structures which require a uniform submission of women and a dominant role by men. Nor is it biblically necessary.

The final issue has to do with implementation in the present. For Paul and the early church the equality of male and female in the new order was a matter of divine revelation and was part of the Christian kerygma. He in turn addressed this truth to the customs and cultural situation of the first century. He did so by appealing to social customs and Jewish theological discussions which are no longer part of our culture nor meaningful to us. We have no responsibility to reinstitute the social customs or the extra-biblical theological appeals. But we do have a responsibility to implement the revelatory principle of the equality of the sexes in our own society, making use not only of biblical and theological insights, but also of extrabiblical information from such fields of knowledge as science and sociology which verify that equality.

One is on firm biblical grounds to insist upon male-female dualism and the complementarity which exists between the sexes. Biologically men and women both resemble and differ. How far differences extend into the



psychological sphere is debated and generalizations at that point are always suspect. Nonetheless, sexual distinctions in no way affect sexual equality in Christ and the new creation. There may very well be pragmatic reasons for role assignments and employee selection-education, training, experience, physical ability, etc.-but such decisions cannot appeal to a biblical base for an ordered subordination of women to men, if Paul's concept of headship is in view.

---

#### NOTES

1I am using the word "feminist" in the sense as defined by Virginia Mollenkott, *Women, Men and the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), p. 90: ". . . men and women . . . who believe that the Bible is properly interpreted as supporting the central tenets of feminism."

2Ibid., pp. 9f.

3"For the Old Testament is a man's 'book,' where women appear for the most part simply as adjuncts of men, significant only in the context of men's activities. . . . The Old Testament is a collection of writings by males from a society dominated by males," Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in Rosemary R. Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p.41. A more balanced estimate is suggested by Mollenkott, *Women, Men, and the Bible*, p. 10: "Although the Old Testament reveals some cultic practices which are distressing to modern women, . . . there is never any outright contempt for women taught in its pages."

4The centrality of this motif for Paul is recognized by a wide range of Pauline interpreters. Cf. Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 44; Gunther Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp.197-99; W. G. Kummel, *The Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Abingdon, 1973)~ pp. 141-46.

5Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1951), 1:308; *History and Eschatology* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), p. 36; *Existence and Faith* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 83, 140, 249.

6Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline*, pp. 259, 295, 303.

7Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 40 (1972): 287f.; Dick and Joyce Boldrey, "Women in Paul's Life," *Trinity Studies*, 2 (1972):19.

8Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco, Texas: Word Book Publishers, 1974), pp. 15f.

9Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," pp. 288f.

10For the status of women in the ancient world, see the following: *Old Testament: Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), pp. 24-40 and scattered references; John Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Women in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: The

Westminster Press, 1977). Judaism: Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp.359-76; G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), 2:119-35. Greco-Roman: Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We're Meant To Be*, pp. 50-53.

11Scroggs suggests that Paul's words about racial, social, religious, and marital equality in 1 Cor. 12:12f.; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:9-11 were appropriated from existing baptismal liturgies that originated in the church before Paul and were thus part of the general preaching of the church.

12Constance F. Parvey, "The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament," in Reuther, *Religion and Sexism*, p. 121.

13Ibid., pp. 121f.

14Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth* (New York: Abingdon, 1971), pp. 160f.

15Ernst Kasemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 71.

16Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), pp. 270-77; E. M. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 24-34.

17The view of some gnostic circles was that women ceased to exist as women and were transformed into men, cf. Parvey, "Theology and Leadership of Women," p.134. For the Greek background of the androgynous concept and later uses of it in Judaism and Christianity, see Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 24-28.

18Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, p. 245.

19Ibid., p. 179.

20G. B. Caird, "Paul and Women's Liberty," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 54 (1971/72):272f.

21Ridderbos, *Paul An Outline*, p. 316; Caird, "Paul and Women's Liberty," p. 276.

22Ridderbos, *Paul: an Outline*, pp. 306-14.

23On the problems connected with translating 7:21, see Boldrey and Boldrey, "Women in Paul's Life," p. 27; Caird, "Paul and Women's Liberty," 274-76.

24Ridderbos, *Paul an Outline*, pp. 316f.; Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We're Meant To Be*, pp. 71f.; Caird, "Paul and Women's Liberty," pp. 272-74.

25Ridderbos, *Paul: an Outline*, p. 317.

26Boldrey and Boldrey, "Women in Paul's Life," pp. 25-27; Ridderbos, *Paul an Outline*, pp. 317f.

27Kephale is the Greek word for "head."

28Peter Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), pp. 24-30; G. K. Knight III, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 25-27.

29Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women*, p. 25.

30It is not clear how Brunner and Knight can speak of the relationship of male and female as being based in the divine intent from creation and then limit its application to relationships within marriage (Christian ?) and in the church, Brunner, pp. 31f.; Knight, pp. 9f. Certainly no such restriction applied in the ancient world; woman's subordination was total including the social, economic, governmental, and vocational spheres. In classical theology the "orders of creation" extended to all human existence and were not limited to the redeemed order. Nor did such a limitation apply in western Christendom until well into the nineteenth century. Why then must the application of the kephale-structure "take an entirely different form today than in the 2d or perhaps the 16th century" (Brunner, p. 31) and be limited to the marital and ecclesiastical realms? One has the uneasy feeling that this is in fact an accommodation to the realities of the twentieth century, a sort of last-ditch-stand on the only remaining ground that is left, rather than being derived from the teachings of Scripture. The nineteenth century learned that the Bible couldn't be used in this way to perpetuate slavery. Hopefully, the twentieth century will come to the same realization with regard to women.

31Quoted by Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, p. 131.

32Knight, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship*, develops his thesis largely with reference to headship as a governmental structure, but he also suggests an ontological basis when he says, "Of course no role assigned by God is completely shed in the psychological and sociological dimensions of our lives," p. 10. This contradicts modern psychological insights which show that assertive and passive, leadership and follower personality types exist among both sexes, in spite of centuries of the cultural subordination of women.

33Stephen Bedale, "The Meaning of Kephale in the Pauline Epistles," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 5 (1954):212; Ridderbos, *Paul: an Outline*, p. 380 and note 64; see also my "Man and Sin in the Perspective of Biblical Theology," *The Asbury Seminarian*, 30 (1975):39-41 and bibliography there.

34Ridderbos, *Paul an Outline*, pp. 376-83, esp. pp. 379-81.

35Ibid., pp. 380f.; Ridderbos thinks it is there by inference, however he insists that a physiological interpretation cannot be made of it: "But it is unwarranted and absurd so to conceive of this as though the wife constituted the trunk of this unity of the two and the husband the head."

36W. D. Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man in Relation to its Judaic and Hellenistic Background* (London: MacMillan, 1956), pp. 157, 183.

37This interpretation is further reinforced by our cultural understanding of the word "head" when it is used in a metaphorical sense. "Heads of

government," "heads of industry," "headquarters," etc., refer to those who have the authority in governmental structures.

38Bedale, "The Meaning of Kephale" pp. 298f., n. 41; Heinrich Schlier, "Kephale, " in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964-), 3:679-81; Scroggs, *Paul and the Eschatological Woman*, pp. 298f., n. 41; Ridderbos, *Paul an Outline*, pp. 381f.

39Phrases such as *to kurio* (Rom. 14:8; Col.3:23), *to christo* (Eph. 6:5), *to theo* (Rom. 14:6), and *eis doxan theou* (1 Cor. 10:31) are ways of speaking about Christian service in Paul's writings.

40Paul was making a play on the double-meaning of the word *aner* as husband and man. The wife has her origin from the man in the sense of Gen. 2:22; cf. 1 Cor. 11:3.

41Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We're Meant To Be*, pp. 30f.

42Ibid., pp.99,102; Boldrey and Boldrey, "Women in Paul's Life," p.22.

43Gerhard Dellling, *Hupotasso*, " TDNT,8:41,45. Dellling points out that when Paul wants to speak of compliance with law, social custom, or ecclesiastical rules as external norms, he prefers *hupotage*, cf. 1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11; 2 Cor. 9:13; Gal. 2:4f; 1 Tim. 3:4).

44Ridderbos, *Paul an Outline*, pp. 293-301.

45IbidL, pp. 460f.

46Boldrey and Boldrey, "Women in Paul's Life," pp. 23-25; Mollenkott, *Women, Men and the Bible*, pp. 21-25, 27f.

47It is not clear whether the words *aner* and *gune* in the passage mean "man" and "woman" or "husband" and "wife," since the Greek can mean either. Thus the English translations and the commentaries vary. The question is debated therefore as to whether Paul intended to make a statement about the relation of womankind to the original man, or of women in general to men in general, or of married women to their husbands, with no reference to single women. My own inclination is to regard it as a statement of the relation of women to men in general, growing out of the origin of womankind from the original man.

48Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, pp. 51-57; Knight, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship*, pp. 32-36; Brunner, *The Ministry and the Ministry of Women*, pp. 21f.; Werner Foerster, "Elousia, " TDNT, 2:573f.

49C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 248.

50Albrecht Oepke, "Katakalypto, " TDNT, 3:562. Oepke goes on to suggest that Paul was attempting to introduce a Jewish custom into a basically Gentile congregation. But the existence of such a Jewish custom is also difficult to establish.

51James B. Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36,"

Westminster Theological Journal, 35 (1973):193-96; Abel Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1965), pp. 164, 177. H. L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament as Talmud and Midrasch* (Munchen: C. H. Beck, 1954), 3:423f. and 429-34, lists Jewish sources which treat veiling practices, most all of which date from the second to the fifth centuries and are of little help for knowledge of first-century Jewish customs.

52This word was used in the Septuagint of Deut. 22:12 to refer to the cloak worn as a covering by Jewish men. Paul was saying that the woman's hair is given to her instead of (anti) a cloak.

53Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils," p. 196.

54Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry*, pp. 161f.; Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils," 198, and references to Jewish sources there.

55Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils" pp. 195f.; 202; Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry*, p. 173; cf. W. J. Martin, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation," in W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1970), p.233.

56Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry*, p. 166; Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils," pp. 198f.

57Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry*, p. 163; Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils," pp. 202f.

58Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry*, p. 169.

59Isaksson's contention that the reference is to Nazarite vows taken by women without their husband's permission is unconvincing, *Ibid.*, pp. 162f., 170f.

60Martin, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16," p. 233, n. 4; Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry*, p. 170.

61Martin, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16," pp. 233f.

62Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils," pp. 200f.

63Martin, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16," pp. 234-39, points out that the definite article in the exonym, "the shorn woman" (v. 5), indicates the existence of such a group in the church, with a background in Hellenistic religious practices.

64Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, *International Critical Commentary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), pp. 227, 231.

65"It is well for a man not to touch a woman" is now commonly regarded to be a quote by Paul out of the letter from the church, originating from an ascetic sentiment which denied marriage.

66Barrett, *Commentary*, p. 257; Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," p. 297, n. 38.

67Barrett, *Commentary*, pp. 248f.

68Boldrey and Boldrey, "Women in Paul's Life" pp. 11f.

69Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, pp. 24f.

70Barrett, *Commentary*, p. 251.

71Boldrey and Boldrey, "Women in Paul's Life," p. 12; Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," p. 298.

72For a survey of opinions, see Morna D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. 11:10," *New Testament Studies*, 10 (1964):412-14.

73Ibid., pp. 412f.; Barrett, *Commentary*, p. 254.

74Caird, "Paul and Women's Liberty," p. 277; Hooker, "Authority on Her Head," pp. 413f.

75Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry*, pp. 180f.

76"Paul and the Eschatological Woman," p. 300, n. 47.

77Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline*, pp. 307, 460; Barrett, *Commentary*, p. 255.

78Jewett's observation on vs.11 f., *Man as Male and Female*, p. 113, that "Here we have what may be the first expression of an uneasy conscience on the part of a Christian theologian who argues for the subordination of the female to the male by virtue of her derivation from the male" is made on his assumption that verses 3-10 are about the subordination of women to men (ibid., pp. 54-57; 112-114). If the interpretation above is correct and the chapter is not about hierarchy and subordination, but about the distinction between the sexes, then Jewett's conclusion would seem to be out of order.

**HOW JOHN FLETCHER BECAME THE THEOLOGIAN**  
**OF WESLEYAN PERFECTIONISM**  
**1770-1776**

by

Timothy L. Smith

The notion that Wesleyan religion is innocent of systematic structure and grounded upon experience is a myth sustained across the past two hundred years by his critics in the Reformed tradition to whom the only theology worthy of the name is Calvinist. For the past one hundred years, however Methodists as well have embraced that myth, sometimes because they were unable or unwilling to bear John Wesley's insistence that the doctrine of salvation is the heart of Christian theology, and sanctification the essence of salvation. The doctrine of Christian perfection was the central theme in all of his religious thought.

Wesley's system of theology was thoroughly biblical. He had early come to believe that the only proper way to approach the Scriptures, and the only means of grasping their unity, was through the hermeneutic of holiness that he derived chiefly from studying them. The command and the promise that we should love God with all our hearts and serve Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives was to him the central theme of every part of the Bible, whatever the immediate setting and purposes of its many books. He was certain, moreover, that the system of biblical theology which emerged from close study of the texts guided by that hermeneutic was best and most scripturally communicated by preaching it. His sermons, therefore, dealt carefully with every major topic in systematic theology. He proclaimed the faith, as Moses and the prophets and Jesus and the apostles had, in situations framed by his intention to bring men and women to the experience of it.

Neither Wesley's own experience nor those of his hearers formed the basis of that faith, however, though for a century the impulse to modernism among Methodists has fed upon the legend that they did. Rather, Wesley believed that clear reasoning about the plain meanings of Scripture would be illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and so by grace bring knowledge of the truth. From this sprang conviction both for one's own sins and of God's supreme love for sinners, as well as the persuasion that the divine purpose

was to renew his obedient children in purity and perfect love. Christian experience reached its full measure, as Jesus had said, in knowing the truth; and the truth would make us free.

John Fletcher became the theologian of early Methodism not because he brought system where none had been, but because he followed Wesley's advice and example of making Scripture the source and criterion of ordered understanding. He steeped himself in the Bible, sometimes studying it on his knees, during the same years he was reading closely the sermons, tracts and poetry of both John and Charles Wesley. Finding them eventually in full agreement, he published Wesleyan doctrine in his own terms, and in theological and polemic essays rather than sermons. But as with John Wesley's doctrinal tracts, the bonding of Fletcher's preaching to his exposition of theology, and of Scripture and reason to his experience of faith, was a daily reality. He brought not novelty of substance but a refreshing variation of style to the proclamation of biblical Wesleyanism. His Checks to Antinomianism began appearing at a moment when, following Whitefield's death, the renewed sharp break with Calvinism endangered evangelical understanding of the Methodist way. Fletcher grasped that danger as an opportunity. His Checks and other writings helped John Wesley both to hold the loyalty of his own followers and for the first time in thirty-five years, to turn the tide of popular sentiment in England toward the doctrine of Christian perfection.<sup>1</sup>

Saintly, learned, and sufficiently independent of mind to stand between the founder and his occasional opponents within the Methodist movement, Fletcher had already secured Wesley's encouragement to write a series of theological tracts when the latter recommended him in 1768 to be president of a new college in South Wales called Trevecca. There Lady Huntingdon, a wealthy supporter of George Whitefield's wing of Methodism, wished to educate young ministers who would stand above the controversy over Calvinism.<sup>2</sup>

Fletcher's early writings and his letters to Charles Wesley and others in the 1760s show that he began where John Wesley had begun thirty years before-with the general doctrine of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who under both the Old and New Covenants manifests Himself in the power of the sanctifying Spirit, especially in the full experience of the new birth. Fletcher employed the same arguments Wesley had used that the Holy Spirit awakens in human beings the dormant spiritual senses, enabling them to perceive and enjoy spiritual reality. He distinguished carefully, as Wesley had much earlier, the "ordinary" manifestations of God's Spirit that are promised to all who seek him-that is, those manifestation which contribute to their holiness and love-from the extra-ordinary gift of languages granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost and to believers at the house of Cornelius and on Paul's first visit to Ephesus. "That they should be baptized with the Holy Ghost and spiritual fire was not extraordinary," he wrote, "since it is the common blessing, which can alone make a man a Christian, or confirm him in the faith. " And he stressed, as Wesley had, the progressive sanctification through which a person born of the Spirit daily "puts on Christ and becomes a partaker of the divine nature" until "the Lord gives him the rest of faith, the substance of things hoped for."<sup>3</sup>



In his early writing and preaching, however, Fletcher may not have emphasized, as Wesley had after 1740, the second moment of sanctifying grace, nor have held up the experience of the apostles at Pentecost as a model of it.<sup>4</sup> His first preaching at Trevecca College, if I have understood the skimpy evidence correctly, linked the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit primarily to regeneration. Appalled at the low state in grace or the absence of it in many of the students, he emphasized strongly and encouraged his assistant, the youthful Joseph Benson, to preach the promise of "internal conversion by the power of the Holy Ghost dwelling in the heart by faith." Such a strategy was reasonable. For it planted Trevecca on the high ground where, as Wesley said in his sermon on the death of Whitefield in the fall of 1770, the two great evangelists had stood in full agreement from the beginning. "The original Methodists," Wesley said, taught that all who are truly "born of the Spirit" have "the kingdom of God within them" and that "His indwelling Spirit makes them both holy in heart and 'holy in all manner of conversation.' " But in the winter of 1770-1771, one of Lady Huntingdon's favorite preachers, Walter Shirley, ridiculed Fletcher's preaching of that doctrine as "perfection," and "baited it out of the place."<sup>5</sup>

Fletcher's handwritten account of the controversy that followed, and of his resignation at Trevecca, was addressed to Lady Huntingdon but possibly never mailed to anyone. It makes plain that preaching about Pentecost there, and perhaps reading John Wesley's sermons and Charles Wesley's hymns, had moved him to identify being baptized with being filled with the Spirit, and so with perfect love. Joseph Benson later recalled that Fletcher's morning sermons at Trevecca generally terminated in his declaration that to be "filled with the Holy Ghost" was "a better qualification for the ministry of the gospel than any classical learning," though the latter might be "useful in its place." He would then invite all who were "athirst for the fulness of the Spirit" to join him in his room, where they often remained until noon, "wrestling like Jacob for the blessing."<sup>6</sup>

One effect of Shirley's preaching, Fletcher complained, was to persuade the students that Joel's prophecy of an "outpouring of the Spirit" was "entirely fulfilled upon the 120 disciples on the day of Pentecost"; that those who became believers thereafter were to "grow in grace by imperceptible dews"; and that "we can do very well without a remarkable shower of grace and Divine effusion of power, opening in us the well of living water that is to flow to everlasting life." Shirley and the students had thus renounced, Fletcher continued, "the grand point which I apprehended was to be firmly maintained and vigorously pursued in the college," namely, "the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which I am bound in conscience to maintain among all professors." He noted that Lady Huntingdon herself had complained of "a harmless expression" he had used "in a letter hastily written to a friend, 'The fiery baptism will burn up self.' " He said he had meant nothing by it save "to convey the idea of a power that enables us to say, with a tolerable degree of propriety, as St. Paul, 'I live not, but Christ lives in me.' "<sup>7</sup>

A little light, but not much, is shed on these events by their intersection with John Wesley's brief correspondence with Joseph Benson dealing with Benson's search for inward holiness. "You judge rightly," Wesley wrote on October 5, 1770,

perfect love and Christian liberty are the very same thing; and those two expressions are equally proper, being equally scriptural. . . . And what is Christian liberty but another word for holiness? . . . Holiness is the love of God and man, or the mind which was in Christ. Now, I trust, the love of God is shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto you. And if you are holy, is not that mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus?<sup>8</sup>

When Benson wrote more insistently of his need of heart purity, Wesley responded December 28, 1770, advising him first not to cast away his confidence in his experience of the new birth: "You have faith in Christ: you know the Lord; you can say [with Thomas after Christ's resurrection] my Lord and my God." Turning, then, to Benson's question whether believers may hope for deliverance from the "inbred enemy," Wesley declared that "many great and precious promises of Scripture" assure that they may. He quoted several of the same ones he had made standard at the conference of 1747, including Ezekiel 36:25-29 and Deuteronomy 30:6. "This I term sanctification (which is both an instantaneous and a gradual work), or perfection," Wesley counseled, "being perfected in love" or "filled with love, which still admits of a thousand degrees." He then urged Benson to confirm the students at Trevecca

(1) in holding fast that whereto they have attained-namely, the remission of all their sins by faith in a bleeding Lord; (2) in expecting a second change, whereby they shall be saved from all sin and perfected in love.

If they like to call this "receiving the Holy Ghost," they may: only the phrase in that sense is not scriptural and not quite proper; for they all "received the Holy Ghost" when they were justified.<sup>9</sup>

If Wesley was referring by the word "they" in this passage to John Fletcher and not to the students who heard Benson's preaching during this period, he was thoroughly misinformed; for Fletcher had from the outset of his ministry stressed as earnestly as Wesley ever did the presence, work and witness of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, or "sanctification begun." Wesley may, however, have been getting garbled reports of Fletcher's teaching. In any event, Benson was discharged by Lady Huntingdon in early January and wrote Wesley in some despair asking whether he was acceptable as a Methodist preacher. Wesley responded on March 9, 1771, that he would indeed be acceptable if he could "abstain from speaking of Universal Salvation and Mr. Fletcher's late discovery."<sup>10</sup>

The modern editor of Wesley's correspondence, John Telford, surmised from this and the letter quoted above that the "late discovery" was Fletcher's doctrine of "receiving the Holy Spirit." His further statement that Wesley thought it "improper to separate the work of sanctification from justification" ignored Wesley's life-long distinction between that initiatory experience and entire sanctification-between receiving and being filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> Recently, several New Testament scholars have come to believe that in the Book of the Acts the words

referring to being "baptized with," "filled with," and "receiving" the Holy Spirit, are interchangeable. They have imposed this belief upon John Wesley and, on the strength of Telford's surmise, concluded that Wesley's letter to Benson was a repudiation of Fletcher's preaching that the 120 disciples of Christ experienced the grace of entire sanctification when they were "filled with the Holy Spirit" on the morning of Pentecost day.<sup>12</sup> This will not square at all with the long record of Wesley's teaching the same thing, nor with his word to Benson, written only seven days later and printed on the same page of Telford's edition of his letters, that

A babe in Christ (of whom I know thousands) has the witness [of the Spirit] sometimes. A young man (in St. John's sense) has it continually. I believe one that is perfected in love, or filled with the Holy Ghost, may be properly termed a father. This we must press both babes and young men to aspire after-yea, to expect. And why not now? I wish you would give another reading to the Plain Account of Christian Perfection. "<sup>13</sup>

A few weeks earlier, Wesley had written one of his preachers expressing gratitude for Fletcher's conduct during the controversy at Trevecca and used another prophetic form of Pentecostal language:

Entire sanctification or Christian perfection is neither more nor less than pure love-love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life of a child of God. The Refiner's fire purges out all that is contrary to love. . . .<sup>14</sup>

And the very next day, March 17, he wrote Mary Stokes, referring, quite untypically, to "receiving" the Spirit in wholly sanctifying grace as a different order of experience from receiving Him in regeneration. "The Sun of righteousness will rise upon you in quite another manner than you have hitherto experienced," he wrote. "And who knows how soon? . . . What hinders you from receiving Him now? . . . Only unbelief keeps out the mighty blessing."<sup>15</sup> Just so much, or so little, of the alleged disagreement between Wesley and Fletcher can we learn from Wesley's letters to Joseph Benson and others in the winter of 1770-1771.

The actual contribution of John Fletcher to the Wesleyan theology of salvation, especially his persistent use of both the terms baptism and fullness of the Spirit to denote the experience of perfect love, is in fact clear from the direct correspondence between him and the two Wesleys during the next few years, and from his published works. So also is John Wesley's gentle insistence that such usage must not obscure the biblical teaching that the Christian's life in the Spirit begins with the new birth. I believe the evidence shows that when his concern on this point was dispelled, Wesley heartily endorsed Fletcher's Pentecostal exposition of holiness. But let me tell the story, and you can judge the evidence for yourself.

When Fletcher resigned from Trevecca, Wesley asked him to examine the recent charge of Lady Huntingdon's associates that he taught salvation by works, and to consider whether they did not in fact teach an antinomian rejection of good works, by denying that holiness of life must flow from saving faith.<sup>16</sup> Fletcher agreed to do so. He was soon ready to acknowledge publicly that he had moved dangerously close to Calvinism for a time

he began at once to write the first of a series of small books defending the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification by grace, eventually titled Checks to Antinomianism. By midsummer of that same year, 1771, Fletcher had completed the first two of these, attacking what he called the "three pillars of Antinomianism," especially the "shibboleths" of imputed righteousness and "finished salvation"-finished, that is, in Christ, requiring the believer only to trust in His merits and not to perform the works of love that fulfill the law.<sup>17</sup> John Wesley, needless to say, was delighted by these essays and recommended them widely.<sup>18</sup>

By November 1771 at the latest, however, Fletcher's intensive study of both the Bible and some of the earlier works of John and Charles Wesley had crystallized his conviction that the founder's interpretations of Scripture to sustain the doctrine of entire sanctification in his Notes on the New Testament had been incomplete. Fletcher wrote Charles on 24 November,

I am busy about my third and last check . . . I want sadly both your prayers and advice. I shall introduce my, why not your doctrine of the Holy Ghost and make it one with your brother's perfection. He holds the truth, but this will be an improvement upon it, if I am not mistaken. In some of your pentecost hymns you paint my light wonderfully. If you do not recant them we shall perfectly agree.<sup>19</sup>

Instead of continuing with this proposed "treatise on perfection," however, Fletcher wrote another Check, contenting himself for the moment with a brief statement equating "baptism with the Holy Spirit" with being sanctified wholly.<sup>20</sup> The essay produced an acrimonious response from his chief Calvinist protagonist, Rowland Hill, and he launched immediately into a fourth one. On 5 July 1772, he wrote Charles Wesley, begging him "to take care, in going once more over the tract on Original Sin, not to let pass anything representing the Law as a covenant of wrath, opposed to the Gospel." The request must have reflected his renewed immersion in such early sermons of John Wesley as "The Law Established Through Faith." For, Fletcher continued,

I am now sure that the Mosaic dispensation was nothing but Gospel in embryo. I think the law can be fulfilled evangelically by love; and that this fulfillment is Christian perfection. On this plan I shall proceed in my treatise on that subject. Be so good, therefore, as to expunge whatever is contrary to it.<sup>21</sup>

A month later he described his own state in grace in another letter to Charles, saying,

I still want a fountain of power, call it what you please, Baptism of fire, perfect love, sealing, I contend not for the name. And yet I find that my views of gospel liberty, I mean the liberty of holy love, clear up; but my heart does not keep pace with my head, and my mind does not remain fixed in one point. . . . Help me by your prayers, directions and example, as you do still by your hymns. .  
. 22

As with Wesley earlier, so now with Fletcher, the interweaving of honest personal quest with profound study of Scripture gave to his theology of

salvation both tenderness and power. In January 1773, Fletcher wrote Charles he was now convinced that unless "the practice of this doctrine does not daily take place, our profession and methodism will dwindle into nothing. Oh for the discipline of the Spirit and the Cross within our own breasts." He was now eager to begin his long-delayed treatise on Christian perfection; but he desired even more. he said.

to stay till I experience the thing. I have but one Doubt. Perfection is nothing but the unshaken Kingdom of God-peace, righteousness and joy in the H.G. or by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Now Query. Is this baptism instantaneous as it was on the day of Pentecost, or will it come as a dew, gradually? . . .

If I consult reason, it seems to me that perfection is nothing but the acts of holiness, faith, love, prayer, praise and joy so frequently repeated as to be turned into easy, delightful habits. If I consult Scripture, I rather think it is nothing but the Spirit dwelling in a believer in consequence of an instantaneous baptism. I should be glad to be fully taught of God on this point, not only not to set any one upon a false scent, but to seek the blessing properly myself.<sup>23</sup>

Six weeks later he wrote Charles, in a postscript to a letter addressed to both the Wesleys, that he would lay aside once more his work on perfection "to face Mr. Hill" and prepare another volume in the long series, called *An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism*.<sup>24</sup>

In the interval between these two letters, Fletcher had received and gently declined the well-known invitation from John Wesley to become the latter's successor as the leader of the Methodist movement. "Thou art the man, " Wesley urged; "God has given you a measure of loving faith and a single eye to His glory. He has given you some knowledge of men and things, particularly of the whole plan of Methodism. You are blessed with some health, activity, and diligence, together with a degree of learning." And to all these, Wesley noted, "He has lately added, by a way none could have foreseen, favor both with the preachers and the whole people. . . Come while I am able, God assisting, to build you up in faith, to ripen your gifts, and to introduce you to the people."<sup>25</sup> Unwilling to take the first negative response for an answer, Wesley visited Fletcher at Madeley for three days the following July and wrote him shortly afterward: "Just now the minds of the people in general are on account of the Checks greatly prejudiced in your favour. Should we not discern the providential time?"<sup>26</sup>

Fletcher, however, was soon buried in the task of adding to his original design for *An Equal Check* a "scriptural essay on the astonishing rewardableness of the works of faith, i.e. good works" and a "rational essay upon the doctrine of salvation by Faith."<sup>27</sup> The latter, finally titled *An Essay on Truth* is Fletcher's finest theological work. He wrote Joseph Benson that in preparing it he discovered that "an over-eager attention to the doctrine of the Spirit has made me, in some degree, overlook the medium by which the Spirit works-I mean the word of truth, . . . by which the heavenly fire warms us. I rather expected lightning than a steady fire by means of fuel."<sup>28</sup> In this commitment to being "a rational Bible Christian"-or, as he put it later that year, one to whom "sober reason and plain Scripture" were

the final authority in "all matters of faith"<sup>29</sup> -Fletcher laid out for the first time in public print his maturing conviction that "the doctrine of Christian perfection is entirely founded on the privileges of the Christian dispensation in its fullness" or, as he put it in a letter to Charles Wesley, "with the accomplishment of the Promise of the Father."<sup>30</sup>

The Essay on Truth was, then, no less scriptural on account of his calling it a "rational essay"; for Fletcher, like John Wesley, found no better and in fact no other way to reason about grace and truth than in biblical terms. Its governing idea was the view of the different dispensations of grace that Wesley had first described-also in specific reference to Pentecost-in two of his early sermons, "Salvation by Faith" and "Christian Perfection," dating from June 1738, and January 1741, respectively. From the former, Fletcher quoted Wesley's distinction of Christian faith, properly so-called, from the faith of a heathen, the faith of pious Jews, and the "faith of initial Christianity." The last, Wesley had said, "the apostles themselves had while our Lord was upon earth," though they did not yet understand or acknowledge "the necessity and merit of his death and the power of his resurrection."<sup>31</sup>

Turning, then, to Wesley's sermon of 1741 on "Christian Perfection," Fletcher quoted his mentor's statement that "we cannot measure the privileges of real Christians by those formerly given to Jews. Their 'ministration,' or dispensation, we allow 'was glorious-' but ours 'exceeds in glory.'" Whoever would "bring down the Christian dispensation to the Jewish standard" errs greatly, "neither knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." Wesley had added that the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus had promised would flow as "rivers of living water" (John 7:38) out of the hearts of those who believed on him, was not given "in his sanctifying graces," even to the Apostles who had been granted power over unclean spirits, until after Jesus was glorified. It was then when "he ascended up on high, and led captivity captive," that he "received" those "gifts for men yea, even for the rebellious, that the Lord might dwell among them." And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, then first it was, that they who "waited for the promise of the Father" were made more than conquerors over sin by the Holy Ghost given unto them.<sup>32</sup> Fletcher protested that those who supposed that he and not John Wesley, had "first set forth the doctrine of dispensations' in connection with the experience of perfect love did him "an honour altogether undeserved." Indeed, he added in a footnote, "This good old gospel is far more clearly set forth in Mr. Wesley's sermon called 'Scriptural Christianity,' and in his 'Hymns for Whitsunday,' " than in the Essay on Truth.<sup>33</sup>

Fletcher's high estimate of the religion of Judaism, like John Wesley's, was thus closely interwoven with the testimony of the Old Covenant to what both men thought were the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion: free grace and holiness; a faith ever "working by love," in obedience to the law of righteousness, as Abraham's faith had.

When I say that pious Jews and our Lord's disciples, before the day of Pentecost, were strangers to the great outpouring of the Spirit, I do not mean that they were strangers to his directing, sanctifying, and enlivening influences, according to their dispensation. For David had prayed, "Take not thy Holy Spirit

from me;" . . . [and] our Lord had "breathed upon His disciples, saying, Receive ye the Holy Ghost" . . . Nevertheless, they were not fully baptized. The Comforter that visited them did not properly dwell in them. Although they had already wrought miracles by His power, "the promise of the Father was not yet fulfilled to them." They had not yet been "made perfect in one," by the assimilating power of the heavenly fire.<sup>34</sup>

Fletcher argued then, from the texts of John 14:1; 15:26; 16:7 and Luke 24:29, for "the three degrees of saving faith, omitted in the Athanasian creed, but expressed in the Apostles' creed." These were faith in the Father, faith in the Son, and faith in the Holy Spirit, conforming to Wesley's faith of a servant, faith of a son, and faith of a father in Christ. Each also conformed to one of three dispensations of grace: of the Jews under the Old Covenant; of the disciples of John and Jesus; and of those who were "made partakers of Christ glorified, either on the day of Pentecost, or after it."<sup>35</sup>

In the closing paragraphs of the "Essay on Truth" Fletcher described the experience not of the Apostles at Pentecost but of the 3,000 "Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven" who were converted later that day. Fletcher declared that when Peter preached Christ to them, "they at first believed on him with a true, though not with a luminous faith." No sooner had they "thus passed from faith in the Father to an explicit faith in the Son, but they cried out, What shall we do? And Peter directed them to make, by baptism, an open, solemn profession of their faith in Christ, and to believe the great promise concerning the Holy Ghost." At that point, Fletcher read his understanding into the text so as to affirm that the experience of the converts wound up being the same as that of the Christian believers who were filled with the Holy Spirit that day. "Upon their heartily believing the gladdening promise relating to pardon and the Comforter," he wrote, "and no doubt upon their fervently praying that it might be fulfilled in them, 'they were all filled with the Spirit,' all their hearts overflowed with 'righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.'"<sup>36</sup>

John Wesley visited Madeley for three days at the end of July 1774, and preached what Fletcher thought were "four excellent sermons" to crowded audiences. A Methodist preacher named Collins came from nearby Gloucester to ask the two of them whether Fletcher had written things in the Essay on Truth that were "subversive of the old Methodist doctrine." Fletcher wrote Charles of the discussion:

I explained myself, and both Mr. Wesley and Collins seemed satisfied. The difference consists (if there is any) in my thinking that those who were justified as Christians, and baptized and sealed with the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and were made of one heart and mind, or were perfected in one, etc., were in the state of Christian perfection, or under the dispensation of the Holy Ghost; at least in the infancy of it. And that (genuine Christian faith of assurance, as counter distinguished from the faith of babes or carnal believers, a faith thus which the apostles had before the day of Pentecost) introduces us into perfect Christianity, or the full kingdom of God, which we must learn to stand and to be established on.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, the discussion had revolved around Fletcher's amplification of Acts 2:38, quoted in the preceding paragraph. Clearly, also, John Wesley, not John Fletcher, was the one insisting on a clear distinction between the experience of the apostles at Pentecost and that of their converts—between being "filled" with the Spirit and so being made perfect in love, and "receiving" the Spirit in the initiation by repentance and faith into the new life in Christ.

Wesley's own words, however, unite with Fletcher's to counter the myth that the founder disowned the Essay on Truth or thought the difference a large one. Wesley himself published the first complete edition of the Equal Check that summer; and in it, beneath Fletcher's signature to the preface, the following words appear: "N. B.—I have considerably shortened the following tracts; and marked the most useful of them with a \*.—J. W. The early editions of Fletcher's Works published in both England and America preserved this note and the asterisks to which it referred. The latter are scattered liberally throughout the two appendices to the Essay on Truth, where Fletcher spelled out in detail his exposition of the Scriptures relating to Pentecost. The following January, Wesley wrote one of the saintly women of Methodism that "Mr. Fletcher has given us a wonderful view of the different dispensations which we are under. I believe that difficult subject was never placed in so clear a light as before."<sup>38</sup>

Argument, after all, was hardly in order between men who were each still searching deeply for the experience of heart purity they were so persistently and effectively preaching to others.<sup>39</sup> In the midst of a letter thanking Charles for his "friendly yet severe criticisms" of the Essay on Truth, Fletcher had written,

I am not in the Christian Dispensation of the Holy Ghost and of power. I want for it, but not earnestly enough; I am not sufficiently straitened till my fiery baptism is accomplished. I fear that Dispensation is upon the decline among us. I see few people deeply mourning for the kingdom of the Holy Ghost.<sup>40</sup>

Possibly in this period also he wrote the letter to Charles, the page of which containing the date, address and signature is long lost. In its opening lines Fletcher reverted to the issue of instantaneous versus gradual sanctification, of which he had written earlier. He wrote:

In general, when my views of things seem cleared I think that there is a gradual rising to the top of John's Dispensation, and that when we are . . . fit for the baptism of Christ, it is in an instant conferred. If any man love me, says our Lord, which implies undoubtedly keeping his commandments, . . . I and my father we will come and make our abode with him.

Then, in a passage whose response from the Wesleys has been lost to history, Fletcher made a memorable suggestion:

I think sometimes that the souls that are dissatisfied as you and I are . . . would do well if after the example of the apostles they retired from the world, to wrestle their 10 or 30 days in an upper room. . . . I think at this time we are perhaps less called to



recommend perfection to others in words, than heartily pursue it in deeds ourselves. The world will generally cry out to us Physician heal thyself, and laugh at us for our pains, unless we are benefited by our doctrine. . . . Shall we only talk about it, or write hymns and checks? . . . Would not a conference of prayer and mutual exhortation among dissatisfied believers, especially preachers, answer a better end . . . ? I, and thousands more, look at you and your brother, just as some of my flock look at me. If it is not for him, they say, it is not for me. . . . I remain confounded, and conscious I am guilty of the pharisaic absurdity of saying and not doing, of tying preceptive burdens upon the shoulders of others which I touch more with my pen or tongue than with my head and shoulders. I hope God has not yet sworn in his anger that I shall not enter into his rest. . . . The Jewish priests were the last to get over Jordan, and to embrace the faith of Christ in Jerusalem; but Christian priests are always first in every good work and conquest. Undoubtedly the apostles went into the kingdom before the 3,000, on the day of Pentecost. If we get in, who knows but perhaps 3 scores may follow us. This is the only way to retrieve the aspired doctrine of perfection.<sup>41</sup>

Despite this appeal, and perhaps strengthened by John Wesley's occasional use for disappointed seekers of the text in the Epistle of James, "Let patience have her perfect work," the three men continued to preach and write as well as to seek the experience of heart purity. John preached more effectively than ever-often during these years of growing favor in parish churches, but far more often in the open because the churches could not contain the people. The largest crowds ever seen in many towns and cities of England came to hear him.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly Fletcher could not lay down his pen. During the summer and early fall of 1774 he wrote the second part of the Equal Check, which he called his Scripture Scales. He then spent the winter of 1774-1775 writing the last volume of his Checks-the long anticipated "treatise on perfection." Wesley passed through or near Madeley on March 15, 1775, preaching his way through the West Midlands towns en route to Liverpool where he would take ship for his annual visit to Ireland. He carried Fletcher's completed manuscript along with him, probably returning it with his letter written from Northwich a week later. He complimented the earlier tract-probably "as convincing as anything you have written," Wesley wrote-then turned to the present one, saying:

It seems our views of Christian Perfection are a little different, though not opposite. It is certain every babe in Christ has received the Holy Ghost. and the Spirit witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God. But he has not obtained Christian perfection. Perhaps you have not considered St. John's threefold distinction of Christian believers: little children, young men, and fathers. All these had received the Holy Ghost; but only the fathers were perfected in love.<sup>43</sup>

That signal was sufficient. During the following weeks, Fletcher reworked the manuscript of what became the Last Check so as to harmonize even this "little" difference. The published version allowed the three thousand converted at Pentecost to stand as unambiguous examples of the new birth, as Wesley, in his last Oxford sermon, "Scriptural Christianity," and always thereafter had construed them to be: they had received the Holy Spirit, but not yet in the fullness of perfecting love.<sup>44</sup> Fletcher needed to say that clearly, whatever else he affirmed about their being under "the dispensation of the Holy Ghost," or he would threaten what to Wesley was the foundation of evangelical doctrine—the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the experience of "sanctification begun." The volume's next-to-last section, titled "An Address to Imperfect Believers," spelled out across several paragraphs the exposition Wesley had affirmed but did not set forth in detail in his last Oxford sermon. Those who had been converted at Pentecost received the fullness of the Spirit at some later occasion, many of them, no doubt, during the outpouring of the Spirit that followed the return of Peter and John from their first appearance before the Sanhedrin, as recorded in Acts 4:31. For the rest, that section reinforced in great detail Wesley's teaching in his sermon "Scripture Way of Salvation" published in 1765, that logic, Scripture, and the experience of his people affirmed it God's preferred plan to "destroy sin by the breath of His mouth, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," with Fletcher's belief that the "faith which fully apprehends the sanctifying promise of the Father and the power of the Spirit of Christ" forces the "lingering man of sin instantaneously to breathe out his last."<sup>45</sup>

Satisfied with his revisions, Fletcher sent the manuscript off to Charles Wesley in London, in late May, imploring his corrections.

I give you carte blanche to add, or top off; but to none but you. Your brother saw it as he went to Ireland and I believe approved of it in general; I hope you see it improved, as I have made many alterations. . . . Well we have all in Christ, let us make more of him and his fulness. The Lord fill you full of his perfect love.<sup>46</sup>

To suppose that the words "none but you" were meant to exclude John Wesley from editing the text suggests Fletcher was an ungrateful and secretive man, which he was not; and it conflicts with what actually happened. Wesley wrote Fletcher August 18, "I have now received all your papers, and here and there made some small corrections. . . . I do not perceive that you have granted too much, or that there is any difference between us. The Address to the Perfect I approve of most, and think it will have a good effect." He also renewed his earlier appeal to Fletcher to become his successor: "When you do not write, you must travel. Sit still till I die, and you may sit still forever."<sup>47</sup>

And what did the Last Check, thus fully endorsed by both Charles and John Wesley and immediately published by the latter, affirm about the biblical promise of entire sanctification? The very points that in recent years have been called Fletcher's aberration in Wesleyan doctrine. And those points were nowhere spelled out in the work more carefully, and with more detailed reference to the writings of Wesley, than in the long section

which declared the experience of the 120 disciples at Pentecost to be the fulfillment of the "promise of the Father," through the faithfulness of the Son, to purify by baptizing in the fullness of the Spirit the hearts of those who in faith and love had become His obedient children.<sup>48</sup>

The law of the Lord, Fletcher reiterated at the beginning of that section-to love Him with all our heart, soul, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves-was central to the religion of both the Old and the New Testaments. The promises of the God of the covenants that he cited then were those John Wesley had for nearly forty years declared to constitute the central theme of Scripture. Taken together, they comprised the hermeneutic of holiness that Fletcher and both the Wesleys thought were not imposed upon the Bible, but integral to every part of it. God would enable His people by faith to keep the law by circumcising their hearts, writing the Torah there, filling them with His Spirit, and cleansing them from inward and "inbred" sin. He had promised to renew them in His own image, pouring out His Spirit in "baptisms of fire which burn up the chaff of sin," thus fulfilling His oath to Abraham that his spiritual children would "serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness" all the days of their lives. Those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" would be filled, Jesus had said; "if any man thirst, let him come to me and drink." Fletcher paraphrased the succeeding words of the latter text (John 7:37-38) in different and more explicit terms than John Wesley had on several occasions used:

this he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given [in such a manner as to raise the plant of Christian perfection], because Jesus was not yet glorified and his spiritual dispensation was not yet fully opened.

And he quoted Wesley's Plain Account affirming the "larger measure of the Holy Spirit given under the Gospel than under the Jewish dispensation" and advising preachers always to "rest the doctrine of Christian perfection on this Scriptural foundation."<sup>49</sup>

Fletcher also stressed the importance of John the Baptist's declaration that the Messiah would baptize "with the Holy Ghost and with fire." He noted that all four evangelists had recited it, and that Jesus repeated it just before His ascension into heaven, calling it "the promise of the Father." This promise Peter declared was fulfilled at Pentecost and was extended for all time to "as many as the Lord our God should call." It was "undoubtedly the greatest," Fletcher said, of all the "exceeding great and precious promises," which the Second Epistle of Peter declares are "given unto us" that we might be "partakers of the Divine nature." He cited Wesley's Notes on the New Testament concerning John 14:15, 23, where the founder had declared that the promise of the abiding Comforter, the Spirit of truth, "implies such a large manifestation of the Divine presence and love, that the former, in justification, is as nothing in comparison to it." And he stressed that the prayer of Jesus for the sanctification of His own in John 17:17, 23, was also answered at Pentecost, in an event whose additional purpose "was to give the world an idea of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, a specimen of the power which introduces believers into the state of Christian perfection."<sup>50</sup>

Careful to avoid the imprecision of which Wesley had complained in his earlier language, Fletcher turned to the latter's last Oxford sermon, and made fully explicit what the founder had said on the text of Acts 4:31 thirty-one years earlier. Not only were the 120 disciples filled with the Spirit on Pentecost day, but thousands of others were "wonderfully converted and clearly justified." Some time after, "another glorious baptism, or capital outpouring of the Spirit," carried these new believers "farther into the kingdom of grace which perfects holiness in one," he wrote. "And therefore we find that the account which Luke gives of them after this second, capital manifestation of the Holy Spirit in a great degree answered to our Lord's prayer for their perfection." Fletcher added, however, that the whole "multitude of them that believed" were likely not all at that moment perfected in love, for God "does not usually remove the plague of undwelling sin" till individuals have "discovered and lamented" it. Rather, "those chiefly, who before were strong in the grace of their dispensation, arose then into sinless fathers."<sup>51</sup>

The first four chapters of Acts teach clearly, Fletcher concluded, that "a peculiar power of the Spirit is bestowed upon believers under the Gospel of Christ"; and that "when our faith shall fully embrace the promise of full sanctification, or of a complete 'circumcision of the heart' in the Spirit," the Holy Ghost would "help us to love one another without sinful self seeking; and as soon as we do so, 'God dwelleth in us and His love is perfected in us.'" The outpouring, and in that general sense, a baptism, of the Spirit was in these and other instances in the Acts a corporate experience; the particular work of grace wrought in each person's heart in those stirring moments-whether the work of awakening to the faith of a servant, or of regeneration, or of perfect love-was conditioned by his or her readiness for it.<sup>52</sup>

Using the phrase "baptism of the Spirit" in this more general sense of any outpouring of divine blessing, whether upon a group or an individual, Fletcher continued thus:

Should you ask, how many baptisms, or effusions of the sanctifying Spirit are necessary to cleanse a believer from all sin, and to kindle his soul into perfect love, I reply, " If one powerful baptism of the Spirit 'seal you unto the day of redemption, and cleanse you from all moral filthiness,' so much the better. If two or more be necessary, the Lord can repeat them."

It was a classic Wesleyan point: the actual and demonstrable realization of perfect love, not merely a "blessing" designated as such, was the sure testimony that a believer had been filled with the Spirit. "Before we can rank among perfect Christians," Fletcher declared,

we must receive so much of the truth and Spirit of Christ by faith, as to have the pure love of God and man shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost unto us, and to be filled with the meek and lowly mind which was in Christ. And if one outpouring of the Spirit, one bright manifestation of the sanctifying truth, so empties us of self, as to fill us with the mind of Christ and with pure love, we are undoubtedly Christians in the full sense of the word.<sup>53</sup>

The echoes of Wesley's emphasis upon substance, regardless of circumstance, ring true here—little wonder that Fletcher sustained the point by reference to Wesley's distinction in the Plain Account between how God deals with the generality of those that are justified, and how he may "cut short his work" in righteousness, "in whatever degree he pleases, and do the usual work of many years in a moment."<sup>54</sup> The burden of Fletcher's argument in the following paragraphs, however, was to show "how unscriptural and irrational it is to suppose that, when God fully baptizes a soul with His sanctifying Spirit and with the celestial fire of His love, He cannot in an instant destroy the man of sin" and "melt the heart of stone into a heart of flesh."<sup>55</sup>

---

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Both Wesley and Fletcher rejoiced in their varying styles, and repudiated suggestions made at the time that they differed on any matter of substance. Compare John Wesley, Northwich, 22 March 1775, to John Fletcher, in John Wesley, *Letters . . .* (John Telford, ed.; 7 vols., London, 1931), 6:146; and John Fletcher, *The Last Check to Antinomianism . . .* (London, 1775) in his *Works* (N. Y., 1877-78; reprinted, 4 vols.; Salem, Ohio, 1974), 2:647, comparing Wesley's mode of describing the faith which brings heart purity with his own.

<sup>2</sup>Luke Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor: The Life, Letters and Literary Labours of the Rev. John William Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley, Shropshire* (London, 1882), 84, 130-60, passim; John Wesley, London, 28 Feb., 1766, to John Fletcher, in Wesley, *Letters*, 3-4; and John Wesley Journal, 21 and 22 July, 1764, in John Wesley, *Works . . .* (14 vols.; London 1872, reprinted, Kansas City, Missouri, 1979), 3:190-91.

<sup>3</sup>John Fletcher, *Six Letters on the Spiritual Manifestation of the Son of God* (London, [n. d.] published posthumously, [c. 1790]), 21, 29 (for the quotations); generally, pp. 6, 7, 18; and, on Pentecost, 40, 41. Tyerman, Fletcher pp. 124-38, summarized this work, and concluded on the basis of evidence not now available, that Fletcher wrote these letters in 1767-69. For other matters in the paragraph, see John Fletcher, *A Letter . . . to the Rev. Mr. Prothero, In Defence of Experimental Religion* [signed Madeley, July 25, 1761], in Fletcher, *Works*, 4:28, 31-32.

<sup>4</sup>An exception (if I have correctly understood the rule!) is John Fletcher, Madeley, 4 Sept., 1764, to "Mr. Vaughan," in John Fletcher, *Posthumous Pieces . . .* (ed. Melville Horne, London, 1791), pp. 118-19, which closely echoes John Wesley's language and use of Scriptural texts concerning both regeneration and entire sanctification.

<sup>5</sup>John Fletcher, Madeley, 18 March 1771, to John Wesley, ms. in Colman Collection, Methodist Archives and Research Center, John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester [hereinafter cited as "MARC"]. this letter is also quoted in Tyerman, Fletcher, p. 177. Tyerman's versions of letters I have seen in the original manuscripts often have small and occasionally significant omissions, and occasionally small additions, not indicated in his text.] See also John Wesley, "On the Death of the Rev. Mr.

George Whitefield" [preached in London, November 18, 1770], Works, 6:178-79.

6Quoted in John Wesley, *A Short Account of the Life and Death of Reverend John Fletcher* (London, 1786) in Works, 11:296. Cf. John Fletcher, "Sermon Outlines," V, on Acts 2:5, in Works, 4:195-96, possibly from his early preaching at Trevecca, which seems to show he then made a "baptism of the Holy Spirit" the agency of both regeneration and of the fullness of the Spirit.

7Tyerman, Fletcher, pp. 180-86, first published this document. The last sentence quoted refers to a text John Wesley consistently used to refer to the experience and life of Christian perfection.

8John Wesley, Bristol, 5 Oct., 1770, to Joseph Benson [at Trevecca], in Letters, 5:202.

9John Wesley, London, 28 Dec., 1770 to Joseph Benson, in Letters, 5:214-15.

10John Fletcher, Madeley, 7 January 1771, to Lady Huntingdon, and the same place and date, to Joseph Benson, in Tyerman, Fletcher, pp. 175-76; John Wesley, Bristol, 9 March 1771, to Joseph Benson, in Letters, 5:228.

11Telford's speculative note in Wesley, Letters, 5:228- it contains also the misstatement that "Wesley held that it was improper to separate the work of sanctification from justification," which is correct only of his understanding of the new birth; it contradicts Wesley's life-long distinction between that initiatory experience and entire sanctification-between receiving, and receiving the fullness of, the Holy Spirit. The awkward confusion persisted in Telford's comment on John Wesley, 11 Oct., 1771, to Joseph Benson, *ibid.*, 5:281.

12See Robert W. Lyon, "Baptism and Spirit-Baptism in the New Testament " *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 14 (Spring 1979): 17-18. Alex R. G. Deasley, "Entire Sanctification and the Baptism with the Holy Spirit: Perspectives on the Biblical View of the Relationship," *ibid.*, 14:27-30, 33, 38, contains wording that now appears not to reflect his estimate of the possibly different meaning of "fullness." Contrast George Allen Turner, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Wesleyan Tradition," *ibid.*, 14:67-71.

13John Wesley, Chester, 16 March 1771, to Joseph Benson, in Letters, 5:228-29. The statement accurately summarizes the order of salvation Wesley had laid out in January 1741, from 1 John 5, in his first sermon on "Christian Perfection," Works, 6:6,16, and *passim*. See also Wesley's equation of being "full of His Spirit" with being "perfected in love, " in *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* [first published in 1766], Works, 11:404, [drawn from the conference of 1759 and first published in his *Thoughts on Christian Perfection*, (London, 1760)]; his repeated emphasis on the instantaneous character of the experience of that grace in the same, 11:393, 398 401-03, 410-11, 442; and John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London, 1976), note to John 14:17-23.

- 14John Wesley, London, 21 Feb., 1771 to Walter Churchey, in Letters, 5:223.
- 15John Wesley, Chester, 17 March 1771, to Mary Stokes, in Letters, 5:230.
- 16The trouble with Lady Huntingdon's party was greatly magnified by Wesley's strong statements in the minutes of the Conference of 1770 on the necessity and reward, as distinct from the saving merit, of good works. See the long account in Tyerman, Fletcher, pp.173 ff.; John Wesley, London, 19 June 1771, to the Countess of Huntingdon, and Dublin, 10 July 1771, to "Several Preachers and Friends," in Letters, 5:258-59, 262-64.
- 17See [John Fletcher, Madeley, c. June 1771] unsigned letter to "Messieurs Wesley," in ms. "Fletcher Volume," p. 39, MARC; and the renunciation in John Fletcher, *The First Part of an Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism . . .* [London, 1774], in Works, 1:427.
- 18John Wesley, London, 6 October 1771, to Philathea Briggs, Letters, 5:280-81, John Wesley, *Some Remarks on Mr. Hill's "Review of All the Doctrines Taught by Mr. John Wesley"* (London, 1772) in Works, 10:375, 412-13.
- 19John Fletcher, Madeley, 24 Nov., 1771, to Charles Wesley, ms. "Fletcher Volume," p. 38, MARC. (This letter, like most of Fletcher's to Charles in this period, heartily thanked him for pruning and correcting his manuscripts before they went to the printer.) Cf. John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns of Praise and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father . . .* London, 1746), in *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley . . .* (coll. And arr., G. Osborn; 13 vols., London, 1869), 4:171-72, 178-79, 181-83, 190-93. On Charles Wesley's role in editing the Checks to Antinomianism, see Thomas Jackson, *Life of Charles Wesley . . .* (N. Y., 1844 [I have not seen the 1st edition, London, 1841]), 660-61. John Wesley, *Some Remarks on Mr. Hill's "Review . . ."*, in Works, 10:438, said of the notion that he had the prerogative to correct all of Fletcher's books, "This is a mistake: of some I have, of others I have not."
- 20John Fletcher, *Third Check to Antinomianism . . .* [London, 1772], Works, 1:160.
- 21John Fletcher, Madeley, 5 July, 1772, to Charles Wesley, ms. In MARC. Cf. John Wesley's sermons, "The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law," and "The Law Established By Faith," in Works, 5:442, 450-51.
- 22John Fletcher, Madeley, 5 August, [1772], to Charles Wesley, in ms. "Fletcher Volume," p. 45, MARC.
- 23[John Fletcher, Madeley, 16 Jan., 1773, to Charles Wesley], in ms. "Fletcher Volume," p. 46, MARC. The address page is missing from this letter, but its contents continue the subjects of his preceding correspondence with Charles.
- 24John Fletcher, Madeley, 28 Feb., 1773, to Charles Wesley, (appended to a letter to "J. or C. Wesley"), in ms. "Fletcher Volume," p. 47, MARC.

- 25John Wesley, Shoreham, [15] Jan., 1773, to John Fletcher, in Letters, 6:11.
- 26John Wesley, Lewisham, 21 July 1773, to John Fletcher, in Letters, 6:33-34; Wesley, Journal, July 9 and 11, 1773, in Works, 3:501-02.
- 27John Fletcher, Madeley, 20 Feb., 1774, to Charles Wesley, ms. In MARC. Cf. John Wesley, Journal, 21 and 22 March, 1774, in Works, 4:9, for his sermon on good works preached the day after he had taken "sweet counsel" with Fletcher; and John Fletcher, First Part of an Equal Check, preface, in Works, 1:427-29.
- 28John Fletcher, Madeley, March 20, 1774, to Joseph Benson, quoted in Tyerman, Fletcher, p. 310.
- 29John Fletcher, Zelotes and Honestus Reconciled, or An Equal Check to Pharisaism Continued Being the First Part of the Scripture Scales to Weigh the Gold of Gospel Truth . . . [London, 1775], preface, in Works, 2:12.
- 30John Fletcher, Madeley, 14 August 1774, to Charles Wesley, in MARC; Fletcher, Equal Check, in Works, 1:589. The language of the two quotations is a paraphrase of that in John Wesley's sermon, "Christian Perfection," preached 4 January 1741, in Works, 6:11 (secs. 12-13).
- 31John Fletcher, "Essay on Truth," in Equal Check, Works, 1:588-89, John Wesley's sermon, "Salvation by Faith," Works, 5:9. Cf. John Wesley's sermons, "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption," and "Christian Perfection," dating from 1740 and 1741, in Works, 5:108 (sec. iii, 8), and 6:10 (sec. 11).
- 32Fletcher, "Essay on Truth," in Works, 1:589-90; and John Wesley, Christian Perfection," Works, 6:8-9 (sec. 8),10 (sec. 11).
- 33Fletcher, "Essay on Truth," Works, 1:591n. Cf. Wesley, sermon, "Scriptural Christianity," Works, 5:48; and John and Charles Wesley, Hymns of Praise and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father, in their Poetical Works, 4:163-207. John Allen Knight, *The Holiness Pilgrimage: Reflections on the Life of Holiness* (Kansas City, Mo., 1973), pp. 63-75, summarizes Fletcher's "dispensational theology," partly on the basis of his Ph.D. dissertation on Fletcher done at Vanderbilt University; but the same author's "John Fletcher's Influence on the Development of Wesleyan Theology in America," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 13 (Spring 1978): 27, asserts mistakenly that John Wesley did not connect Christian perfection with Pentecost.
- 34Fletcher, "Essay on Truth," in Works, 3:590n. Fletcher's apparent telescoping at this point of the faith of "pious Jews" and of Jesus' disciples before Pentecost led to confusions that Wesley's four dispensations had avoided.
- 35Ibid., 1:591-92. Cf. 1:533-34, 539, 566, 575, on the salvation of "righteous heathens" and "pious Jews"; and, on Cornelius, 1:579-80.
- 36Ibid., 1:592-93. Fletcher also used here Peter's account in Acts chapter 11 of the experience of the Holy Spirit in the household of Cornelius as a similar example of this "coming of Christ's kingdom with power" and



of His disciples being "made perfect in one," expanding considerably on Wesley's cryptic use of Acts 15:10 as descriptive of heart purity in the sermon "Christian Perfection," Works, 6:17 (sec. 26).

37John Fletcher, Madeley, 14 August 1774, to Charles Wesley, ms. In "Fletcher Volume," p. 50, MARC. In the letter Fletcher confesses to a degree of uncertainty about only one point in the essay-making "the dispensation of the Holy Ghost (contradistinguished from the dispensation[s] of the Father and the Son) to be the grand characteristic of Christian Perfection."

38See Fletcher, Works, (2nd American edition; 6 vols.; N.Y., 1809), 3:150-52; Richard Green, *The Words of John and Charles Wesley: A Bibliography* (2nd. ed., London, 1906), entry No. 304, p. 177, for the quotation from the first edition; and John Wesley, London, 17 January 1775, to Elizabeth Ritchie, in Letters, 6:137.

39John Wesley, Journal, 1 Aug., 1774, in Works, 4:25, contains one of many references during this period to persons who believed God had "delivered them from the root of sin" and whose testimony seemed to him so "simple, clear, and scriptural" that he "saw no reason to doubt it." Cf. the same, entries for 28 Jan., and 24 Oct., 1774, and for 1 Jan., 14 Mar., 4 Aug., and 15 Oct., 1775, 4:7, 32, 39, 40, 51, 57. And see also the three letters for Nov. 20, 26, 27, 1775 in Wesley, Letters, 6:190-91.

40John Fletcher, Madeley, 4 July, 1774, to Charles Wesley, in ms. "Fletcher Volume," p. 49, MARC.

41[John Fletcher], n.p., n.d., to [Charles Wesley], in ms. "Fletcher Volume," p. 51, MARC.

42See the Journal for March and April, 1774, in Works, Vol. 4, and almost any month following, for evidence of a great turning of the tide of popular attention and respect. The texts of his sermons in these and the following months show many new ones.

43John Wesley, Northwich 22 March 1775, to John Fletcher, in Letters, 6:146; John Wesley, Journal, ;4 and 17 March, 1775, in Works, 4:40-41. Cf. Fletcher, *Zelotes and Honestus*, [the Scripture Scales], Works, 2:9-260.

44Cf. John Fletcher, *The Last Check to Antinomianism: A Polemical Essay on the Twin Doctrines of Christian Imperfection and a Death Purgatory* (London, 1775), Works 2:631, with the quotation above, at n. 35, from the "Essay in Truth." The real difference between the two men had been, though small, precisely the opposite of what a perhaps hasty reading of these documents has prompted several to conclude it was. The sequence of events set forth here was not clear to me when I wrote the article printed in *The Preacher's Magazine*, 55 (Fall 1979): 58, affirming the Last Check to have been already published before Wesley wrote Fletcher the letter of March 22. 1775.

45Fletcher, Works, 2:647, omits a line after the words "fully apprehends" in the quotation above. [It is restored here from the 2nd American edition of his Works, (6 vols., N.Y. 1809) 6:259-61.] Cf. John Wesley, sermon, "Scripture Way of Salvation," 30 March 1764, in Works, 6:53, and

John Wesley, Westminster, 15 Nov., 1775, to Mary Bosanquet [who became John Fletcher's wife six years later], in Letters, 6:189, stressing the instantaneous character of inward, as over against outward, holiness.

46John Fletcher, Madeley, 21 May 1775, to Charles Wesley, in ms. "Fletcher Volume," p. 51, MARC.

47John Wesley, Brecon, 18 Aug., 1775, to John Fletcher, Letters, 6:174-75. Wesley also noted in the letter that the recent conference had followed Fletcher's advice to be "more exact than ever in examining the preachers both as to grace and gifts."

48Fletcher, Last Check, in Works 2:627-57. Cf. 2:523-26.

49Ibid., 2:627-29, the quotations being from p.629 (the brackets and the words they contain are in the original, and are presumably Fletcher's); John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, As Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley, from the Year 1725, to the Year 1777 (London, 1777; first printed, London, 1766), in Works, 6:408. Cf., above, the quotation from Wesley's sermon, "Christian Perfection" [1741] at my footnote 31.

50Fletcher, Last Check, in Works, 2:629-31.

51Ibid., 2:631. This passage is the one which, I believe, Fletcher had edited to conform to Wesley's views, thus closing the "small difference" between them.

52Ibid., 2:632.

53Ibid., 2:632-33.

54Ibid., 2:633.

55Ibid., 2:634-639, the quotation being on p. 636.

**THOUGHTS UPON THE WESLEYAN DOCTRINE OF ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOME SIMILARITIES WITH THE ROMAN  
CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF CONFIRMATION**

By  
Laurence W. Wood

Wesleyan scholars should not simply equate "baptism with the Holy Spirit" and entire sanctification. To do so would be to ignore that Pentecost had to do primarily with the rise of the Church. Yet, in an important sense the "baptism with the Holy Spirit" is to be associated with entire sanctification, though not equated.

In this respect, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between the Church as the corporate Body of Christ on the one hand, and individual members on the other hand. This distinction can be seen in the thought of Paul when he writes "to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2), yet he designates the actual status of individual members within this one church, some of whom are carnal in contrast to being spiritual.

While the Church as the corporate body of Christ is holy, individual members may not have fully appropriated sanctifying grace. In this respect, it is one thing to be holy "in Christ" by virtue of our position in the Church, but it is another thing for Christ to be formed in us. <sup>1</sup> To be sure, to be "in Christ" by virtue of our initiation into the body of Christ involves an actual change (regeneration and initial sanctification), but individuals in the Church do not usually fully appropriate sanctifying grace until some time subsequent to their conversion-initiation into the Church.

Hence, while the "baptism with the Spirit" has to do primarily with the formation of the Church as the holy people of God, there is also a sense in which it can be said that "baptism with the Spirit" effects the holiness of individual believers within the Church. Inasmuch as the baptism in the Spirit suggests the fullness of sanctifying grace which is a characteristic of the Church as the corporate body of Christ, it also seems appropriate to associate the baptism with the Spirit with Wesley's concept of Christian

perfection as it relates to the individual believers within the Church. In this respect, "baptism with the Spirit" in Acts 2 focuses primarily upon the "objective" formation of the Church as the "corporate" body of believers, whereas the Pentecostal experiences in Acts 8, 9, 10, 19 focus primarily upon the "subjective" appropriation of the life of the Spirit in individual believers. In making this distinction between the "corporate" (objective) aspect and the "individual" (subjective) aspect, one can see that the former was an unrepeatable event in salvation history, whereas the latter is to be repeated in the life of each individual believer within the Church.

This brings us to a discussion of a most remarkable similarity that exists between the Roman Catholic doctrine of confirmation and the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification. In Roman Catholic theology, baptism has to do with inauguration into the Church, whereas confirmation has to do with the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit who empowers the individual believer to live the Christian life. Hence there are two sacraments of initiation, not just one. Without experiencing both baptism and confirmation one has not been duly initiated into the Christian life, for they "belong together in the single Christian initiation" and although they are "extended in time" they are "ultimately one."<sup>2</sup>

Roman Catholic scholars cite as exegetical support for the subsequent rite of confirmation the very same passages in the Book of Acts that Wesleyan exegetes cite for their distinction between the birth of the Spirit and the fullness of the Spirit. (Incidentally, if the Wesleyan tradition had a stronger emphasis upon the idea of the sacraments and the visibility of the Church as the body of Christ, such exegetical claims by Roman Catholic scholars might not seem so unrealistic).

This striking similarity between the Roman Catholic doctrines of baptism and confirmation and the Wesleyan doctrines of conversion and entire sanctification has largely gone unnoticed. It can be enlightening to us in the Wesleyan tradition to examine the common elements in our otherwise rather divergent traditions, especially since such a study could enhance our understanding of the meaning of the baptism with the Spirit in the light of a more comprehensive doctrine of the Church as an organism (something which has been sorely lacking in our Wesleyan tradition).

The extensive but highly significant quotation which follows and which is taken from William J. O'Shea of the Catholic University of America shows the very close similarity between the Catholic doctrine of confirmation and the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification.

The key to the whole problem seems to be in remembering that, according to Christian tradition going back to the third century, confirmation [the sacrament in which the baptized believer receives a Spirit-filled character] completes and perfects baptism. There is no need, therefore, of trying to discover something altogether different in confirmation from what is given in baptism. Some theologians, such as the late Gregory Dix, thought that the remission of sins was all that was given in baptism whereas the Spirit was given only in confirmation. But there is absolutely no warrant for thus deforming the sacrament of baptism. As we have seen, baptism is the sacrament of new birth. New birth is so often connected with

the bath of water that one cannot hold otherwise. But new birth is impossible without the action of the Spirit-that Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, who also quickens our mortal bodies to life.

Therefore we may say that confirmation does not add anything new to baptism, nor give us anything we do not already have. But it completes, brings to full development, what is already there. That is why we must say that so many of the Scripture texts that refer to baptism also refer to confirmation. On the other hand, there are Scripture texts which refer verbally to baptism, but the fullness of what is connoted there is attained only through confirmation. The classic example, of course, is the Pentecost-event itself, because Pentecost was at once the baptism and the confirmation of the infant Church.

In treating of the relationship of baptism to confirmation, we must not forget that there is no opposition between the two, as though either one were a rival of the other. Rather there is continuity between them, and the development of the same process of sanctification [*italics mine*]. Baptism is a sacrament in its own right; it remits sin and gives grace. It could not do these things unless it gave the Holy Spirit. Precisely because baptism engenders in us life in the Spirit and the life of the Spirit, it awaits that completion and fullness which is necessary to make the baptized believer a perfect Christian. . . . By this sacrament the believer's being as a Christian is completed. He is clothed with the fullness of the Spirit after the likeness of Christ. In fact, the clue to the relationship of the two sacraments lies here. They both have for their aim to conform the believer to Christ, to reproduce Christ in him.<sup>3</sup>

It is quite clear that the Catholic doctrine of confirmation (like the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification) means the perfection of sanctifying grace begun in conversion whereby "the believer's being as a Christian is completed" since "he is clothed with the fullness of the Spirit after the likeness of Christ."

It is also clear that for the Catholic doctrine of confirmation (like the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification) there is "prescribed" a time-lapse between "these two separate, yet related, anointings."<sup>4</sup> In fact, the Catholic doctrine of confirmation cannot be repeated for any baptized believer because it has to do with the perfection of "character" and if one's character is perfected in confirmation, there could be no need for further confirmation.<sup>5</sup> Hence confirmation (like entire sanctification) is a second definitive work of grace in the life of the Christian believer, though the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification does not absolutize the crisis aspect.

That there is a clear distinction between the beginning of the Christian life and a second definitive work of grace in Catholic theology can also be seen in the distinction that is made between "Easter" and "Pentecost" as a pattern of Christian experience.

However theologians view the effects of the sacrament, all are agreed that confirmation is the sacrament that bestows the Holy Spirit in a special way. Just as we can say that baptism is the sacrament of the resurrection, so we can say that confirmation is the sacrament of the sending of the Spirit. As we associate baptism with Easter, so we associate confirmation with Pentecost.<sup>6</sup>

Like Calvinists today who attack Wesley's doctrine of a second work of grace, even so John Calvin engaged in a scathing attack upon the Roman Catholic theology of confirmation with its emphasis upon a second experience which completes the work of grace begun in the new birth. Calvin specifically rejects the Catholic exegesis of Acts 19:1-2. For him the subsequent experience of the Spirit of the Ephesian believers was a visible sign and manifestation of the Spirit which served a purpose peculiar to the evangelistic needs of the apostolic period. But the Catholic notion that the baptism with the Spirit was a perfection of the Christian life was to utter "horrible blasphemies."

But the Papists are worthy of no pardon, who being not content with the ancient rite, durst thrust in rotten and filthy anointing, that it might be not only a confirmation of baptism, but also a more worthy sacrament, whereby they imagine that the faithful are made perfect who were before only half perfect,-whereby those are armed against the battle, who before had their sin only forgiven them. For they have not been afraid to spew out these horrible blasphemies.<sup>7</sup>

As it has already been pointed out, for Wesleyan theology it is one thing to be "in Christ," yet another thing for Christ to be formed in us. Likewise, confirmation for Catholic theology means the believer is to be conformed to Christ.

It was his own Spirit that Jesus poured forth abundantly on Pentecost, with the mission of continuing among men the mystery of the incarnation. This is the Spirit poured out on us in confirmation. Its mission in us is the same: to bring us to the full measure of the age of Christ.

Just as Jesus needed the presence and the action of the Spirit to realize to the full God the Father's design in him we need the same Spirit to realize the divine plan in us. The divine plan is that we should be conformed to Christ, be made in his likeness.<sup>8</sup>

O'Shea further points out that "the difference between baptism and confirmation is the difference between giving life and enabling that life to reach its full potential. Confirmation gives us the power to be what we already are by baptism."<sup>9</sup>

Another highly significant comparison between Roman Catholic theology of confirmation and the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification is that it is the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit who effects "Christlikeness" in the life of the baptized believer.

These two separate, yet related, anointings must be reproduced in the life of the Christian. The first anointing of the Spirit takes place at baptism, making him the adopted son of God. The second takes place at confirmation when the Spirit descends upon him again to make him a prophet, to equip him with the gifts he needs to enable him to live fully the life of an adopted son, and to fulfill his mission in the Church. In confirmation he is empowered to function properly as a member of the priestly people, that is, to offer God spiritual and true worship in the true temple which is the body of Christ, the Church.<sup>10</sup>

What this means, then, is that every baptized believer is to have his own unique individual Pentecost. "The Spirit we receive in confirmation is the Spirit of Pentecost. That confirmation is the individual Christian's Pentecost is shown by the prayer at the end of the rite of confirmation."<sup>11</sup> O'Shea goes on to show that for "the Fathers and Doctors of the Church . . . what happened on Pentecost happens now to the individual Christian."<sup>12</sup>

In The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II there is a direct association of the "gift of the Holy Spirit" to the "perfection" of the believer's character. The chapter entitled, "The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church," can-not be surpassed as a concise statement on what holiness means, if its identification of Roman Catholicism with the only true church were eliminated. The call to holiness is the call for "individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity."<sup>13</sup>

Of special significance in these documents is the relating of the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit with perfect love.

The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and everyone of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consummator of this holiness of life: "Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect". . . . Indeed He sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that He might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength and that they might love each other as Christ loves them.<sup>14</sup>

It is further urged: "Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity."<sup>15</sup>

What is significant is that Roman Catholic theology appeals to the same biblical passages as does Wesleyan theology to support its doctrine of holiness, as well as to support its distinction between baptized believers and perfect Christians who have been filled with the Holy Spirit in the rite of confirmation.<sup>16</sup>

Even in Wesley's day it was said often enough that his doctrine of entire sanctification was highly influenced by Roman Catholic theology. What should also be evident is that John Fletcher's relating the gift of the Holy Spirit to Christian perfection has its historical roots in Roman Catholic theology as well!<sup>17</sup> In this respect, John Wesley's Anglican heritage was too easily forgotten by his followers in the succeeding generations. Though Wesley in some respects may have departed from the

liturgical and traditional aspects of his Anglican background, it should be kept in mind that at heart he was always a loyal churchman and steeped in the Anglican tradition. He always insisted that his teachings were thoroughly Anglican.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, Wesley's followers largely dropped his Anglicanism and forgot about his heritage. What has happened as a result is that the Wesleyan-Arminian emphasis on holiness has appeared all too often as an aberration. Instead of understanding and appreciating the Anglican heritage which serves as the basis of the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness, the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition cut itself off from dialogue with the Anglican tradition. Hence, Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification has been made to appear as an innovation within church history as well as a mere "inference" if not an imposition on Scripture. Hence, the Lutheran and Reformed traditions do not take seriously the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection.

In this respect, it should be remembered that Wesley locates the source of his doctrine of entire sanctification firmly within the Anglican tradition especially in such thinkers as Jeremy Taylor.<sup>19</sup> For Taylor, it was the "ordinance" of confirmation which effected perfection of character.<sup>20</sup> He felt so strongly about this rite that he wrote "A Discourse of Confirmation" in which he sought to defend it against those who neglected its importance. For him, it is the Pentecostal reception of the Spirit in confirmation which makes the life of holiness possible. Confirmation, if it is met with inward faith, makes the baptized believer a "perfect Christian."<sup>21</sup> He further says: "Until we receive the spirit of . . . confirmation, we are but babes in Christ, in the meanest sense, infants that can do nothing, that cannot speak, that cannot resist any violence, exposed to every rudeness, and perishing by every temptation."<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Wesley distinguishes between "a babe in Christ" and "those who are strong in the Lord." The former refers to believers, the latter to the entirely sanctified believer.<sup>23</sup>

Taylor defends the rite of confirmation on the basis of Acts 8. He says that though the Samaritans became believers as a result of Philip's ministry, they needed "a teleiosis, something to make them perfect." <sup>24</sup>

Likewise he argues in the same way in regard to the Ephesian believers in Acts 19. Following both Roman Catholic and Anglican tradition,<sup>25</sup> Taylor makes a clear distinction between the work of the Spirit in regeneration (baptism) in which our sins are forgiven and a subsequent experience of the Pentecostal Spirit (confirmation) who "enkindles charity and the love of God."<sup>26</sup> In further describing the subsequent working of the Spirit in the life of the baptized believer, he writes:

The Holy Ghost is promised to all men . . . Confirmation, or prayer and imposition of the bishop's hand, is the solemnity and rite used in Scriptures for the conveying of that promise, and the effect is felt in all the sanctifications and changes of the soul. . . . Hear what the Scriptures yet further say in this mystery: "Now he which confirmeth, or stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God: Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." Here is a description of the whole mysterious part of this rite.<sup>27</sup>



That Anglican (following Roman Catholic) theology interprets the reception of the Spirit by the Samaritans and the Ephesians in Acts 8 and 19 as confirming and sanctifying grace subsequent to their becoming baptized believers is most probably why Wesley himself in his Explanatory Notes on the New Testament gives these same passages the same possible interpretation.

Wesley thus could hardly have been unaware of the liturgical rites of baptism and confirmation and what they signified, even though there are no significant references to confirmation in Wesley's writings. In the Anglican ritual of confirmation which was revised in 1662 and used in Wesley's day, the following is found in one of the prayers: "Confirm and settle the godly Resolutions They have now made. Sanctify Them throughout that They may become the Temples of the Holy Ghost."<sup>28</sup> The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is mentioned elsewhere in the ritual as well. It seems to admit of supposition that Wesley was tacitly (if not explicitly) aware of the similarity of his doctrines of conversion and entire sanctification with the Anglican rites of baptism and confirmation.

It must also be apparent that John Fletcher could not have been unaware of his Anglican theology which specifically linked Pentecostal language to the subsequent work of "perfecting" grace in confirmation. Even though Wesley may have referred to Fletcher's linking "receiving the Spirit" with entire sanctification as "a late discovery,"<sup>29</sup> (though this is problematic), surely Wesley and Fletcher knew that Pentecost had been linked to confirmation from the earliest times of Christian tradition.<sup>30</sup> Hence, it could be said that the genius of John Wesley and John Fletcher was not that they created a doctrine of entire sanctification, but that they gave it the true evangelical interpretation by ridding it of its objectivistic and sacramentarian weight.

James Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, is methodologically correct to address himself at the same time both to the Wesleyan doctrine of a subsequent experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer on the one hand, and to the Roman Catholic theology of the sacraments on the other hand.<sup>31</sup> It is also significant that Dunn (along with other Reformed scholars) allows in his exegesis no other conclusion than that the Pentecostal event means "purity of heart," "circumcision of heart," and "loving God with all the heart."<sup>32</sup>

Whereas Dunn and others in the Reformed tradition allow for only one crisis moment (i.e., conversion-initiation), the Wesleyan and Catholic traditions allow for a second definitive work of grace. It should be pointed out, however, that Roman Catholic theology understands the two works of grace primarily sacramentally and objectively, whereas Wesleyan theology understands the two works of grace evangelically and subjectively (i.e., experientially). To be sure, for Roman Catholic theology, freedom from sin and the actual restoration of character subjectively occur for most baptized believers in purgatory (except for Saints who are perfected in love in this life). Yet, objectively (and to some extent experientially) this perfection is realized in confirmation.

That confirmation, however, is not viewed exclusively in an objectivistic fashion is made clear by Austin Milner.

The effect of the sacrament may be completely blocked by his lack of faith or sinful disposition, yet he remains one over whom the Church has prayed and proclaimed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As soon as the blocks to this grace from his side are removed, the action of Christ in the sacrament will take effect.<sup>33</sup>

Karl Rahner, *A New Baptism in the Spirit: Confirmation Today*, seems to move toward a more evangelical understanding of the baptism with the Spirit within Roman Catholicism. Though he still links the baptism with the Spirit to confirmation, he appreciates the charismatic renewal within the Church with its strong emphasis upon the need for a personal "baptism with the Spirit" which comes after confirmation. His mediating position between the liturgical rite of confirmation and an evangelical experience of the "baptism with the Spirit" is expressed in this way: "Why, then, may we not look forward to a new, revitalized understanding of confirmation, the sacrament of the Spirit, on the basis of these experiences bursting forth everywhere in the Church today?"<sup>34</sup>

A similar question could be put to Wesleyans at this point: May we not look forward to a new, revitalized understanding of Christian perfection, the fullness of the Spirit, on the basis of a new appreciation of the sacraments and of the Church as an organism—the entire body of Christ—when we no longer overly stress individual experience in isolation from the "corporate" Church?

It seems to me that the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification could profit greatly through an intensive study of the Roman Catholic theology of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, while at the same time avoiding formalistic and extreme sacramentarian notions of grace.

Two final comments. First, to insist upon one grand beginning moment of conversion without any definitive, subsequent, sanctifying grace as does the Reformed tradition is to ignore the many biblical passages which summon the believer to holiness and perfection of heart.

In this respect, one of the key verses which Wesleyans have used to show the relation between Pentecostal language and entire sanctification is Acts 15:8-9 where Peter declares that the disciples along with the house of Cornelius had their "hearts cleansed by faith" through the baptism with the Spirit. John Calvin also points out that this passage involves

a double manner of purging, because Christ doth offer and present us clean and just in the sight of his Father, by putting away our sins daily, which he hath once purged by his blood; secondly, because, by mortifying the lusts of the flesh by his Spirit, he reformeth us unto holiness of life. I do willingly comprehend both kinds of purging under these words; because Luke doth not touch one kind of purging only, but he teacheth that the whole perfection therefore consisteth without the ceremonies of the law.<sup>35</sup>

Calvin further acknowledges that "we are bidden to 'love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our faculties' [Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37]."<sup>36</sup> Yet he argues against the possibility of achieving this state of grace because

If we search the remotest past, I say that none of the saints, clad in the body of death [cf. Rom. 7:24], has attained to that goal of love so as to love God "with all his heart, all his mind, all his soul, and all his might." . . . I further say that there will be no one hereafter who will reach the goal of true perfection without sloughing off the weight of the body.<sup>37</sup>

#### For Calvin and the Reformed tradition in general at conversion God

clothes us with the innocence of Christ and accepts it as ours that by the benefits of it he may hold us as holy, pure, and innocent. . . . Covered with this purity [of Christ], the sordidness and uncleanness of our imperfections are not ascribed to us but are hidden as if buried.<sup>38</sup>

Hence, purity of heart is imputed to us in Christ, though in practice we strive to actualize it. On the other hand, for some in the Methodist tradition (e.g. J. B. Atkinson)<sup>39</sup> to separate the "baptism with the Spirit" from entire sanctification is inadvertently to surrender the doctrine of holiness to the mere process view of the Reformed tradition, for surely James G. Dunn (representing the Reformed tradition) is exegetically correct to relate Pentecost to circumcision of heart and "loving God with all the heart."<sup>40</sup> Hence to tack on the experience of entire sanctification as an addendum to the Pentecostal reality would seem in fact to drop it.

Second, it also seems hermeneutically inappropriate for us in the Wesleyan tradition to attempt an exegesis of the doctrine of entire sanctification while ignoring the experience of that tradition. Just as no one today can ignore 2000 years of Church tradition in his interpretation of the New Testament,<sup>41</sup> even so we cannot ignore Charles Wesley, John Fletcher, and the subsequent holiness tradition in interpreting John Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification. To be sure, the Bible is our primary source of theology, but tradition, experience, and reason are also essential sources of theology as well. Wesley made this point very clear. That is why he insisted that something must be wrong with our exegesis if experience and tradition contradict it.<sup>42</sup>

Since the association of entire sanctification with the baptism with the Holy Spirit has been a main part of our Wesleyan tradition since the time of John Wesley, it should occasion a serious pause in our thinking if that association is altogether wrong. Nevertheless, it must be frankly said that tradition can be wrong. And, to be sure, there have been extremes and abuses in the Wesleyan tradition in this regard, but "let's not throw the baby out with the bath water."

Further, before one disassociates entire sanctification from Pentecostal language too hastily, one ought to consider the long exegetical tradition in Roman Catholic theology of a similar association. If there is not taught in Scripture any definitive experience of the baptism with the Spirit in a sanctifying work subsequent to regeneration, then the exegetical scholarship of the Roman Catholic tradition has also been negated.<sup>43</sup> While the Catholic theological structure of baptism and confirmation imposed on these exegetical foundations may be in need of re-adjustment, yet their exegetical bases for distinguishing between the beginning of the Christian life

symbolized in water-baptism and the establishing (or confirming) grace of God in the perfection of love through the Spirit's fullness seems to be an impressive (though indirect) support for, if not a substantiation of, the Wesleyan position.

Perhaps it could be reasonably concluded in "good Wesleyan style" that one's exegesis may be faulty if it stands against Christian tradition and experience. In this respect, the Roman Catholic tradition, the Anglican tradition of Wesley's day, and the Reformed tradition (e.g. James Dunn and Karl Barth)<sup>44</sup> relate the baptism with the Spirit to perfection of love. It seems to me that the only real question which these traditions raise is whether or not there is a subsequent experience of the Spirit which Wesleyans call entire sanctification and Roman Catholics call confirmation, or whether or not there is only a process of being sanctified which in Reformed theology is begun in only one definitive work of the Spirit. To be sure, the Catholic tradition understands confirmation in objectivistic terms, whereas the Wesleyan tradition understands entire sanctification in subjective terms, while they both allow for two definitive works of grace.

That the language of Pentecost relates to the believer's perfection of love seems indisputable from the standpoint of a rather broad section of Christian tradition. Is the reality which Pentecostal language denotes "imputed" or "imparted?" For Calvinist theology, the "purity of Christ" is imputed, only imparted in an incomplete manner. For Roman Catholic theology, the "purity of Christ" can be fully appropriated in this life, though usually it is not. For Wesleyan theology, the "purity of Christ" ought to be, and in many cases is, the norm of the Christian life.

---

#### NOTES

1Cf. Wesley, "The Lord Our Righteousness," Standard Sermons, ed. E.H. Sugden (London: Epworth, 1956), 2:423-41.

2Karl Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), p. 416.

3William J. O'Shea, Sacraments of Initiation (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 62.

4Ibid., p. 63.

5Cf. Karl Rahner, A New Baptism in the Spirit: Confirmation Today (Denville, N. J.: Dimension Books, 1975), pp. 19-20; Foundations of Christian Faith, pp. 416-17.

6O'Shea, pp. 48-49.

7John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Acts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 2:211.

8O'Shea, p. 65.

9Ibid., p.66

10Ibid., p. 63.

11Ibid.

12Ibid.

13The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II, p. 151.

14Ibid., pp. 151-52.

15Ibid.

16Cf. O'Shea, pp. 54-55.

- 17See Fletcher, *Checks to Antinomianism* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1889), 1:590-91; 2:617, where Fletcher specifically associates confirmation with Christian perfection.
- 18"A serious clergyman desired to know, in what points we differed from the Church of England. I answered, 'To the best of my knowledge, in none. The doctrines we preach are the doctrines of the Church of England; indeed, the fundamental doctrines of the Church, clearly laid down, both in the Prayers, Articles, and Homilies.' He asked, 'In what points then, do you differ from the other clergy of the Church of England?' I answered, 'In none from that part of the clergy who adhere to the doctrines of the Church; but from that part of the clergy who dissent from the Church, (though they own it not), I differ in the following:-First, they speak of justification, either as the same thing with sanctification, or as something consequent upon it. I believe justification to be wholly distinct from sanctification and necessarily antecedent to it.' " *Works of the Reverend John Wesley* (New York: Published by J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1831), 3:153-54. It has on occasion been said that Wesley always used entire sanctification whenever he meant Christian Perfection. Otherwise, he supposedly used the unqualified word, sanctification, always in the sense of what happens at justification. It is true that Wesley said one should, to be precise, use entire sanctification when that is what is meant. But the fact is Wesley was rarely consistent with his own advice at this point. The preceding quotation shows this.
- 19Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), p. 5.
- 20*The Whole Works of the Right Reverend Jeremy Taylor* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1867), 3:14.
- 21Ibid
- 22Ibid, p.6.
- 23*Standard Sermons*, 2:169.
- 24*The Whole Works of the Right Reverend Jeremy Taylor*, 3:13.
- 25Ibid., 2:17ff.
- 26Ibid., 1:763.
- 27Ibid., 3:27.
- 28Peter J. Jagger, *Christian Initiation 1582-1969, Rites of Baptism and Confirmation Since the Reformation Period* (London: SPCK, 1970), p. 32.
- 29*The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1960), 5:228.
- 30Cf. *Jeremy Taylor*, 3:17ff.
- 31James D. G. Dunn, *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (SCM Press Ltd., 1970), pp. 1-3.
- 32Ibid., p. 156. Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1969), p. 8.
- 33Austin Milner, *The Theology of Confirmation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 102.

34Rahner, p. 7.

35Commentary on the Book of Acts, 2:19.

36Institutes of the Christian Religion (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:604.

37Ibid., 1:353.

38Ibid., 1:779

39J. B. Atkinson, *The Beauty of Holiness* (London: Epworth Press, 1953), p. 151.

40Dunn, p. 156.

41Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:36.

42Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), p.

43Austin Milner, pp. 11-41.

44Church Dogmatics, tran. G. W. Bromily (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1969), IV, Part 4, p.